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# THE HOUSE OF COURAGE

✦ Mrs. VICTOR RICKARD ✦



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# **THE HOUSE OF COURAGE**

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IN THE LIGHT OF THE OPEN WINDOW SHE SAW HIS FACE, AND HE  
OPENED HIS EYES AND SMILED

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# THE HOUSE OF COURAGE

BY

MRS. VICTOR RICKARD

Author of "The Light Above the Cross Roads," etc.

FRONTISPIECE BY

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**Dedicated**  
TO  
**J. M. M., C. M.,**  
**AND J. DE M. S.**



## **PART I**

**"'Tisn't life that matters! 'Tis the courage you bring to it."**

**HUGH WALPOLE.**

# THE HOUSE OF COURAGE

## CHAPTER I

KENNEDY GLEESON sat with his elbows on a small table, where the remains of his dinner lay in the inartistic dishevelment usual to the conclusion of a meal. The restaurant where he had dined was a small one, of no particular standing, and one reason why he had chosen it was because no band played in the establishment. For the rest, there was very little to be said about it, except that the room was low-pitched and full of smoke, and a range of dirty mirrors surrounded the walls, duplicating the scene.

Groups of other diners sat talking in low voices, or staring apathetically before them if they were alone, and the waiters who hurried backwards and forwards, dressed in the strange, unhealthy-looking clothing of their profession, were every one of them foreigners. The food had not been good. It was a mere make-believe which opened the menu with a variety of *hors-d'œuvres* coloured by the addition of a glass dish of small radishes; but, like everything else at *Mon Repas*, they were only a pretence and tasted of sawdust. As Kennedy Gleeson sat over a glass of port, which appeared to have a close relationship of flavour with some far more alcoholic drink, he wondered why he had remembered the queer little place at all. He could catch no link in memory which explained his having turned in there; but there he was.

He was back in England from the sheer heights of a snow-topped hill in Kashmir, where he had been



shooting for the better part of six months, and he was still at heart in the great silent places he had left; and the winds and sun, and the strong, clear light of the East, had hardened his face and given him a few lines around his strong blue eyes. He was a remarkable-looking man in any company, and, amid the surroundings where he sat, he struck a note at once so violent and so compelling that, though he was unconscious of the fact, every one in the room was profoundly aware of him. The waiters watched him, and the man who attended his special table stood looking at him from time to time, his round, pale face a study in mingled admiration and curiosity. The fat, stern-looking Frenchwoman at the pay desk, enclosed in glass as though she were a precious jewel, also watched him with approval: she told herself that there was something *magnifique* about this unwonted client; and the other diners discussed him after their fashion. One or two of the gaily dressed and strongly scented women who were there alone went so far as to order another *café and cognac*, just on the chance that the spell of concentration evidently upon him might break, and the young man who looked so interesting suddenly find that he wanted companionship. Kennedy was dressed with no eye to creating a sensation, in a grey suit which had seen wear, and a dark tie. He had the easy air of a man who is perfectly sure of himself, and he was interested in his own thoughts.

At the age of twenty-eight he had come to realize the value of isolation, and, though he liked his fellow-men and was unquestionably popular, he often preferred to be alone. At that very moment he might have been the welcome guest in a dozen different houses, or sitting at his club surrounded by enthusiastic friends. Even in his grey suit he could have gone to any of the most exclusive of the London restaurants without causing a single eye to travel over him with the limitless scorn which would have been

meted out to another. His thick hair was brushed straight back from his forehead, and his clean-shaven face was sensitive even in its quiet strength. There was reticence about the lines of his mouth, and though his eyes had a touch of boldness and even challenge in their quality, they were far more humorous than tender. In every line he silently conveyed the impression of passion in its finest and highest sense, and even if all his illusions had not come intact through the wear and tear of twenty-eight years, the joy of the morning stars was still with him, and would abide with him to the last hour of his life on the little green planet.

The strange thing about Kennedy Gleeson was that he had never done anything. Every one expected him to "arrive" in some way or other, and yet nothing had happened. He had money enough to be independent—rather a rare condition for an Irishman—and Fate, which seemed perpetually to point towards some great event, had continued to point—towards vacancy; an accumulation of the loose ends of the years. All his ecstasy of energy, which might be part of talent or might even rise to the level of genius, was bearing no fruit, and the hidden volcanic force, which had impetus sufficient to remove mountains, was being used to carry his restless body to the uttermost ends of the earth with a couple of rifles and a case of cartridges.

Politics, social affairs, the greater questions of the day, made, so it seemed, no appeal to him. He had never ranted in the Union during his time at Oxford, and he inherited the purposeless sensation that came from a detached feeling which he described himself as "the curse of God and Ireland." "I owe everything to the fact that I am Irish, and I've done nothing at all for my own country." That was his attitude. But, with a curious touch of the abiding resentments which are part of the country of his heart and birth, he did

nothing for any other. The sorrowful faculty of not caring enough had shadowed and followed him, and Fate pointed to vacancy. He had come back to England for his sister's wedding. She was to marry Lawrence Grove, owner of a place on the river Blackwater, with the musical name of Adrigole.

Kennedy had known Larry Grove since they both rode ferociously against each other as small boys in the hunting-field, and their friendship had gone on. There had been no reason for it to cease, as it consisted of very little more than mutual early memories. Now Larry was going to marry Hilda, his only sister, who had never left Castle Glenfield, and had remained one of those quiet, observant, and rather shy Irish girls whose material boundaries are limited, but whose special spiritual scope goes beyond measure if time and circumstances call to the hidden spring. Kennedy intended to cross to Ireland the following day, and he thought of Hilda as he sat looking at the stained cloth and the sediment of crumbs which covered the table before him.

He had seen very little of her, and he felt that he had failed to do all he might. His father and mother had been dead for ten years, and their place taken in Castle Glenfield, then his own property, by Aunt Lucy. Miss Gleeson was certainly a remarkable woman, but she could hardly make up for all that Hilda had missed.

But Hilda never grumbled. She had a kind of grave magic about her, and she wouldn't have been happy away from home. He filled his glass again with the rough, fiery port, and told himself how bad it was.

Now she was going to marry Grove; a good sportsman and interested in his own property. He never left the place except to attend race meetings in England, and, occasionally, at Auteuil, and they would be happy together.

Gleeson frowned slightly. The uneventfulness of the prospect distressed him a little. Through his own

life he heard the sound of far voices calling—and wherever he followed, the cry always came from a still greater distance. His thoughts changed suddenly, and he looked round the room. An ugly-looking couple of people sat opposite to him. The man was overfed and shapeless as a large slug, and his look was sordid and dull, but he did not jar upon the mind of Kennedy as much as the woman with him.

He imagined that she was older by a good many years than her companion, and either she was married to him, or long and close intimacy had forged a chain as enduring as that of a legal tie. Her face was lined and worn, but she had coloured it a bright, rosy pink, and her hair, which was a rusty and fictitious red, had lost all its flexibility and shine. Still, in spite of these defects, she appeared quite well pleased with herself, and smoked a cigarette in a long holder, glancing at her reflection in the glass, and throwing occasional looks of subdued invitation towards Kennedy himself.

He realized, with a sense of apologetic discomfort, that, while he thought so long, he must have been staring at her fixedly.

On his left, one of the silent women with an ash-white face and crimson lips shrugged her shoulders, got up, and, paying, as we all do, for having taken a risky chance, walked out into the night. The other member of the same sisterhood, who believed in patience, waited on. Men were often slow and perverse—but one never knows——

As he awoke from his dreams, Kennedy's waiter, the round-faced young man with an ill-shaven chin and watery blue eyes, became alert, and advanced as though he was half hypnotized.

"Get me my bill," Kennedy said, and then their eyes met.

Above all else, Gleeson was endowed with a power of sudden and frequently unintelligible sympathy, and he fancied that this wretched creature, who had to face

the early hours in dress clothes and a dirty white shirt, was, in some special way, very miserable. It wasn't his fault that he was a Swiss or German waiter and had to live in an atmosphere of cooked food, strong scent, and crudity; and as he responded to a glimmer of some feeling very dimly comprehended in the weak blue eyes, so unlike his own, he felt most genuinely sorry.

"What's the matter with you, Fritz?" he asked in his slow, attractive voice; as he asked the question, he smiled the smile that made every gypsy hawker he had ever met in the streets stop him, tell him he had a lucky face, and ask for some silver, which they invariably received. Teddy Harrington, one of Gleeson's friends, said that it required a fortune to keep up Kennedy's smile; it was worse than a mortgaged property any year.

The waiter turned round, glanced over his shoulder, and stood in a position of great humility, fiddling with a table-napkin of very doubtful cleanliness. He said very little, and only admitted that he was unhappy.

"I am from Schwerin in Mecklenburg, my hope is near a great lake, and here in London I am lonely."

Gleeson nodded. He could understand the longing that must come to a man born within the wild play of winds from the Baltic, and living near a vast space of wide water, feeling that *Mon Repas* was a bad exchange. "Oh, well, life has more than one side to it," he said kindly; "and remember that, even if it makes the present conditions harder, it is always well to have clean memories."

The waiter looked at him, hesitated, and glanced around him again.

"*Mein Herr*," he said, lowering his voice and making a pretence of clearing some odds and ends from the table, "are you likely to return here again?"

He spoke confidentially, and his manner was like that of a conspirator. Kennedy Gleeson immediately

concluded that the waiter had been bullied, and went in fear of Madame in the glass case, or the other waiters, who hovered near their tables like birds of prey around a corpse.

"I don't know," he replied. "The food is bad and the drink worse. No, I shall not come back."

The heavy-looking diner with the dull expressionless eyes rose and rapped irritably on the table, and the woman who was with him smiled blandly in the direction of Gleeson.

"One minute, sir." Fritz sped away in response to the call, made out a bill, and, folding it discreetly, placed it on a plate and presented it to the man, who sat down and studied it carefully.

Kennedy was not in any real hurry, and he watched the objectionable-looking pair with some touch of passing interest. The man had power about him: the power of an insolent and invulnerable self-confidence, based, no doubt, upon the fact that he was very much sharper than most of his acquaintances. The bloated and repulsive-looking profile presented to Kenny Gleeson lighted suddenly, and, raising his head, the man beckoned to the waiter. There was a mistake in his bill, and he expressed his sense of disapproval in a loud, hectoring voice, speaking guttural German. Gleeson could feel the vast cosmopolitan experience of the man floating around his very person. He might be a Levantine, he thought; and, whatever he was, he enjoyed exercising his coarse and yet controlled power to bully and assert himself.

The whole thing was like a scene in a play, and the woman, with her awful artificiality, stared and listened, and occasionally broke into a high tittering laugh. It was as though there were some deeper meaning hidden behind it all—as though the Levantine and the waiter from Schwerin were old enemies.

In his thick, superior voice, the man in the well-cut clothing of established prosperity set out to reduce the

poor creature, and to convict him of deliberate fraud. Gleeson felt his own nerves throb in response to the power of the hidden thing behind the squalid quarrel. Remote suggestions of some old antagonism seemed to glare out of their eyes, as the few people who remained in the restaurant leaned forward and made an audience for them. The Levantine upset his glass with a movement of his arm, and the dregs of the wine spread slowly over the cloth. In a way, so Kennedy thought, the affair was horribly funny, but Fritz, his late acquaintance, was getting the worst of it.

As he talked, the bulky creature was really squeezing the greatest joy from what he did. He was letting all his savage instincts run riot behind his well-fed suggestion of outraged honesty. Against him, the blond, ill-made youth, in his dejected clothing, was only a shadow, albeit, at that moment, an angry and tortured shadow, whom some vivid past experience had engrained to the depths of the soul with strife. They had now passed from the items of the bill to bitter warfare of words, and Madame, in the glass case, was growing uneasy. Gleeson got up, and the woman who believed in patience powdered her face surreptitiously and smiled. He crossed to the table in front of the red velvet lounge-seat where the two abominable diners were sitting, and he spoke to the Levantine.

"You called this man away when he was going to give me my bill," he said, in a voice of careful politeness; "I made no objection at the time——" he broke off, Madame was standing at his elbow. She had not decided whose part she was going to take. It was ill to lose clients, and, as a waiter, Fritz, whose real name was Karl Haff, was not a success, and she watched Gleeson attentively, who turned immediately and spoke to her.

"Madame, you will no doubt settle this question at

once. Fritz may not be a good waiter, and his arithmetic is at fault, but I am convinced he is honest."

The Levantine leaned back, his eyes cast down, and a curious look of derision on his face. He did not look up either when he spoke, and said in English: "It is no business of yours."

Fritz had melted into the background, and Madame was launching out an avalanche of tact and discretion in a high-pitched voice, but without avail. The man, having received the corrected bill, paid it with a gesture of angry submission to injustice. The scene was over, the incident closed. He unhooked his umbrella from a peg, took down his hat, and gave his companion a rough push forward. As he passed Gleeson he stared at him, and Kennedy returned his look, so that for a moment he paused.

"Yes," Kennedy said, with an irrepressible laugh, "there is one thing I should like to know. How is it that, so far, no one has broken your neck?"

It was, in fact, the question he had asked himself when first he looked round the room and reviewed his company. Apparently the Levantine had no desire either to retort or embroil himself in another quarrel where the odds were differently adjusted; and a very much braver man than he might have hesitated to undertake a round with Kennedy, once he was actually spoiling for a fight.

"Thank you, *mein Herr*, thank you." The gratitude in the voice of the waiter was unmistakable. "I should have got into very great trouble had I been discharged."

Gleeson got up and took his soft hat from the hands of the shaking creature, who appeared to be a bundle of overstrung nerves.

"I told you I was sorry for you," he said. "Now, take my advice and clear out of this place and get back



to the Baltic. It's a damned thing to be a waiter, anyhow. I don't know why it is, but it is."

"Perhaps, *mein Herr*, you will return? And then I might speak to you again."

"Oh, God knows," Gleeson laughed as he handed Karl Haff the most liberal tip he had ever received; "I may come back, but it isn't likely. Good-night."

After he had gone, Karl Haff brushed away the crumbs and collected the knives and glasses. He glanced at the woman who believed in patience. She gathered her few oddments together and nodded to Karl.

"Nothing doing," she commented briefly, as she went out.

And then a flood of supper clients, who wanted a fresh set of plates and spoons and glasses, began to flow in, and *Mon Repas* was filled once more with its strange collection of guests.

## CHAPTER II

**K**ENNEDY arrived at Castle Glenfield, where preparations for the wedding were in full swing.

The house was an old one, built on a large scale, and standing on a high plateau of ground overlooking the Blackwater. In summer and winter, spring and autumn alike, the view was wonderful, and the great shining pathway of the river stretched around the rocky curve, which stood up sheer and strong like an embattled tower, and traced its path on to the west in shining glory, through the distant country. Castle Glenfield stood on the extreme point, above Adrigole, and was the more important and distinguished house of the two; and the windows along the front faced towards the wonderful blending of blue, strong vivid green, and purple, all changing, glowing and melting one into the other in the mystic light of an Irish day. The overwhelming beauty of the place was sentient and living. It took its children to its heart and made them one with it, and the far play of light and shadow over the hills came and went like smiles over a beloved face.

All through his journey, Kennedy had been awaking old memories by the sudden recognition of things long forgotten. The familiar country which had been closely linked with his childish recollections carried his thoughts backwards, across the years. He remembered a battered-looking cottage, standing in a derelict potato patch, the whole of the broken fence lined with a collection of empty tins, which, like flies in amber, had puzzled his young imagination. The cottagers could never have eaten so much soup, sardines, and peaches in a dozen lifetimes, and yet there they were, and had

never been explained. The tins were a definite mystery to him once again; and he, with a life's experience behind him, was no better able to give any lucid explanation. As a boy he had demanded some reasoned tale which could give him at least a lessened sense of bewilderment, but no one had been able to come to his rescue. The train, proceeding with dignified leisure, had passed the place before he had time to do more than notice that they were rust-reddened and still there.

He arrived on a beautiful morning, the earth lying warm under a fair, faintly blue sky. The car, an innovation since the last time he had been home, met him at the station of Castle Glenfield, a wayside station in a bower of lilac bushes, some distance from the little village itself, and three miles' run from the house. Once in the car he was swept more rapidly through the memory land, where he saw himself as a child again, and he wondered if the China roses which grew over the porch of the gate lodge would still hold some blossoms, or whether the strange skirl of wind which lived like an ogre in that special corner had already destroyed them and driven their delicate petals over the white gravel of the avenue.

He could not put the past behind him. It was closer to him than the present, more real than anything, and when he ran up the steps to the open door and stood in the wide, square hall, paved with grey stones, he was still with the little Kenny who had belonged to a mother with wonderful laughing eyes, and a father who remained only a remote memory of a brooding and gloomy presence.

His sister was the first person he met. She came running down the staircase, blushing vividly, and looking as though the summer had got into her hair. She was completely happy.

Hilda Gleeson was two years younger than her brother, and there was a strong family likeness between them, except that her hair was pale gold, and she

was of a very much slighter build. She had a frank simplicity of manner, and her eyes were the eyes of a dreamer to whom the world of men appears a curious place, full of surprises. She was dressed in white, and looked as though she belonged to the day outside, where the soft sunlight was flowing over the lawn and turning the river into a sheet of gold, with dark shadows. Her beauty was the beauty of a white hawthorn in flower, and there was always a demure touch about her, just a hint of austerity. She had grown up in the place, and its dreams and songs were her own. With all this, she was a good sportsman, and the fact that Larry Grove hunted his own pack of harriers constituted a great link of unity between them; for, while Hilda loved the wild beauty of the country and its gorgeous colour, Larry loved his hounds, and could seldom be induced to speak with any real animation upon any other subject. Kennedy held her at arm's length and looked at her.

"It suits you very well," he said, watching the little smile that came to the corners of her mouth, which was just the slightest bit crooked; adding, no one could quite say how, or how much, to the value of her charm.

"I'm going to be very happy," she said softly; "it was good of you to come back for it, Ken."

He took her arm, and they walked into the room on the left of the hall, which had always been the smoking-room. Ivy had grown heavily upon this side of the house, and fell across the upper half of the high windows, and, with a return to the past, Kennedy walked to the window.

"What's happened to the laburnum?" he asked.

"Oh, it grew so straggly that Aunt Lucy said she couldn't bear it unless we put it into a petticoat, so it was cut down." Hilda laughed. "Aunt Lucy says that Larry has really nothing to commend him but his legs."

"I suppose everything is going on as usual?" Gleeson sat down by the writing-table and smiled again as he looked at his sister.

"You've been so generous"—she ran to him and put her hands on his shoulders. "Aunt Lucy will stay here, and, at Adrigole, I shall be quite near—Adrigole," she repeated the name, and her eyes grew dreamy. "I am going to be so happy, Ken; I wish you could find some one——"

"I?" he shook his head; "for God's sake, Hil, don't suggest such a thing. I'm as wild as ever. When the mood comes I have to get up and go. Was there a tramp in the family, I wonder? One of our ancestors who trudged the roads——" he broke off. "You won't mind the monotony of it—a perpetual eternity, as it were?"

She looked round the room at all its faded comfort and ugly, inartistic solidity, which had become dear to her to an extent hardly possible for her brother to realize. "I'm not like you, that way. Larry and I won't be dull"—she seated herself on the arm of his chair; "we both know this life and it is what we want. Anything else would be an earthquake."

"But earthquakes come—somehow."

"Not in County Cork"—she pressed her face against his; "we aren't in the tropic zone, or wherever it is that you find these things happening. Some day you will come back here and grow things in the garden and realize the immense excitement of watching them come up. Yes, you will—oh, not for ages yet, but some time."

"Something very strange will have to happen first," he said; "growing things makes no appeal to me. If you plant the wretched seeds it seems such bad manners not to be there when they are taking all the trouble to flower. But, Hil, tell me about your plans. You're getting married this day week, and then you're going away."

"We thought of the Continent, and then we felt that we should be so foolish there. Larry said that I would be shocked; and neither of us talks any French or German. We don't want to see sights, and so we decided to go over to Market Harborough, where there is to be a puppy show, and on, to watch the jumping at Olympia. It will be very interesting."

Kennedy Gleeson wondered a little at her. Other people's happiness is often very hard for the looker-on to comprehend; and he thought of the kindly, good-natured Larry, whose province was so clearly encircled in a limited space. Larry was amiable, and had a picturesque look about him; he was certainly not without a very decided and quiet dignity of his own; but to be raised to the seventh heaven because life was to resolve itself into an eternal partnership with Larry appeared quite incredible.

Their talk drifted off along another channel, and, after a little, Hilda said she must go back to her guests.

"Elodie is here," she said, standing by the door, her hand on the wonderful wrought-brass handle, which, it must be admitted, had not been cleaned for a considerable time. "You won't remember her, but you will remember Teddy."

"I haven't seen Teddy since I left Oxford. Is he engaged? Actually? It all makes one very old. Is he coming, or is he here?"

"Only coming down for the wedding. His regiment is stationed in Cork. Elodie used to come over sometimes for the hunting; that's how I knew her." Hilda laughed and made a funny little gesture she had with her hands. "I have to see Mr. Watts now—oh, Ken, he is so funny. He hasn't married any one in the parish church here since he came, fifteen years ago, and I know he'll read the burial service by mistake, or insist upon christening us. We both get so nervous and jumpy, and Larry won't see him at all. He says

that clergymen frighten the life out of him. Then Aunt Lucy doesn't like Mr. Watts, and when she doesn't like any one it's always pretty bad-going for them, so I make the arrangements myself."

"I must go and see Aunt Lucy," Kennedy said, following his sister into the hall, and going up the wide stairs which divided half-way up, from where a large and imposing-looking figure of a classic lady, holding a lamp in one hand and a bunch of her eddying draperies in the other, had watched the staircase from time immemorial. Whom she was supposed to represent, or how she came there, no one exactly knew, but she was a feature of the house.

Kennedy looked at her and thought that once she had represented his idea of the most exquisite female beauty. He thought her so proud and so aloof, and then later on he considered her a failure because her lamp went out of order and had never been mended again.

Aunt Lucy's room was at the end of the corridor, on the first floor, and he knocked at her door, still in the strange and half-irritating condition of living two lives at once, and feeling a queer, nagging sense of disappointment to find that Hil could be so happy, merely because she intended to marry Larry Grove.

A sharp voice told him to come in, and he opened the door. The room was large and lofty, and Aunt Lucy sat at a small table near one of the windows, writing a letter, several sheets of which were already covered with her fine, spidery writing. Everything in the room belonged relentlessly and determinedly to the early Victorian era, and Miss Lucy Gleeson herself was a survival.

She was small and compact in figure, and her wrinkled face was at once humorous and stern. Born of the ruling classes, she was very much of a tyrant, but instead of resenting her tremendous authority, the servants in the house and the tenants on the property

admired her for it, and were in a sense proud of her temper.

"Sure, isn't she the living mock of old Anthony Gleeson?" was their comment; for tradition lives long in Ireland, and old stories gain a kind of mellow glory by constant repetition.

The "living mock" of Kennedy's grandfather rose to her feet and greeted him with a kiss, and then Aunt Lucy looked at him with attention.

"Well, Kenny, and so you are back to us? You look well. I like the look of you. When you went away last you had the makings of a man about you, and now you have all the air."

She sat down in a low chair by the fire, for, whatever the weather was, Aunt Lucy had a fire.

Kennedy took up his place opposite to her, and began to give her an account of his last Odyssey, to which she listened with the look of a very intelligent bird.

"And Hilda has decided to marry that young Grove," she remarked, in tones that suggested disapproval. "Adrigole is near. It's wonderful how many marriages arise from the fact that it takes no effort for people to meet each other."

"The advantage—or disadvantage of propinquity," suggested Kennedy; "still, Larry is a good fellow."

"She might have done better," said Miss Gleeson. "Or, indeed, why should she marry at all? I had more offers than any girl in the ring of the Blackwater, and I wouldn't have one of them. It's only a pack of trouble."

Kennedy laughed; he foresaw no trouble at all.

"It looks to me as though Hil's lines had fallen in pleasant places. Too quiet, too prosperous—too level——"

Aunt Lucy leant forward and put her hand on his arm.

"You are saying that very soon," she remarked; "the years bring changes. I am fond of your sister,



even though she gets the rough side of my tongue, and I have never seen any one born with her eyes who has not had to face through a storm." She looked at him with a long, steady look. "You too, Kenny, though you have come off very well. Did you ever hear of a destiny mark?"

"Never, Aunt Lucy," he said with gravity, for he saw that she was in very serious earnest.

"Well, perhaps because I'm old, or because the Gleesons have always been unlike other people, I see these things."

She relapsed into silence, and Kennedy looked round the room, where quaint, faded old photographs stared at him with their ghostly eyes.

"Have you seen the company?" Aunt Lucy asked, with a sudden return to animation. "Uncle Richard, the Sutherlands, those silly people the Frank Northcotes—Hilda would have them—and there's Elodie St. Hope. She is a daughter of Henry Almwroth, a Welsh baron."

"What do you think of her?" asked Kennedy, not because he felt particularly interested.

"She's a fool," said Miss Gleeson with decision; "engaged to that hopelessly stupid young man, Harrington, and is already at her wits' end how to continue the fiction. I remember when he used to come here with you from Harrow in the holidays. He was a fool as a boy; he is a bigger fool as a man."

Kennedy got up and began to play with the ornaments on the chimney-piece.

"I wonder if we aren't all fools, in a sense?" he said. "Anyhow, Aunt Lucy, I am horribly conscious that I have no sort of claim to wisdom myself."

"When are you going away?" inquired his aunt, who hated abstract speculation. "And where, when you do go? Castle Glenfield wants a master, and though I object to marriage, I think you ought to have a wife."

"Probably to America," Gleeson said, ignoring the latter part of her suggestion; "and then I might come back after Christmas to hunt over here."

"Oh, you might," she said, with a dry laugh; "and, when you do, I'll put up my umbrella to prevent the shower of stars that will be falling. You'll come back for my funeral, or maybe the christening of Hilda's first baby. You're the kind of man whose sense of duty comes out for occasions. Well, well, Kenny, you are what God and your poor mother made you, and she thought the sunrise wasn't created for any one but yourself. Dark, day, and dawn she spoiled you. Now you'll go your own way, and, mind you, there will come a time when you will remember my words."

Kennedy left his aunt's room feeling very much as though he was still a small boy. Aunt Lucy always threatened and warned, prophesied hard things, and bade people remember her words. In actual fact she adored her nephew, and had ably assisted in the process of spoiling him. She belonged to the generation which looked with the utmost scorn upon a daughter, and regarded a son as a recognized ruler. She would rather have taken the opinion of the gardener, merely because he was a man, upon most subjects, than that of the most educated and distinguished woman of her acquaintance. "Women are no good," she said, though, if her precept had been applied to herself, she would have resented it with fierce hostility.

If Kennedy had been a boorish, ill-conditioned being, with rough manners and no particular charm, she would still have been his faithful ally. Even if he had drunk himself stupid and filled Castle Glenfield with the riff-raff of the country-side, like Manville-Harvey, who always had her good word, or spent all before him like his own uncle, Richard Joicey, he would still have been the son of the house, and, as such, her allegiance would remain sure. As it was, Kenny had what she called "the light of good morning" about him.

No one else quite knew what the phrase meant, but there was something in it. There was the grace of his outline, the attractive way in which he wore his clothes, and, above all, there was the charm of his quick smile. He was a nephew whom any aunt might well have been fond of.

Yet she knew herself what she meant when she said that he was not going to escape his destiny. Fate pointed so faithfully to something which was hidden away behind the mountainous shoulders of the years, but Aunt Lucy believed that, sooner or later, the object indicated by the steady pointing finger would be revealed. And when she thought of it, and she was sure that she was quite alone, Miss Gleeson allowed the slow, painful tears of age to course unheeded down her cheeks, for she knew that her beloved would have to suffer, and she could not bear the idea.

### CHAPTER III

**K**ENNEDY spent the rest of the morning in the stables and wandering round the place, pursued by memories. Most of the house party were present for lunch, and Mr. Watts, the rector of Castle Glenfield, had remained on for that meal as a matter of course. Whoever called during the morning always lunched at the house, and what struck Gleeson chiefly was the abundant sense of happiness around him. Every one was happy, and the laughter and talk continuous.

He had been away from Ireland long enough to be impressed by the quick, fluid ability of the minds of all these good-looking, easy-going people, who were his own kin. Even Mr. Watts, who was nothing to boast of as a preacher, was a cheery soul, and added to the noise and effervescence with high bursts of laughter that rang over the rest. He was also a tactful man, and when Aunt Lucy, who could never entirely forsake the weapons of war, tried to embroil him in a controversy, he slid out of the difficulty by having recourse to his favourite comment, which neither betrayed his own feelings nor gave cause for affront. Mr. Watts said "*My! My!*" and left it at that.

Every one was present except Elodie St. Hope, and she had gone to lunch with the Hugo Vincents some three miles up the river, who were old friends of hers, and so Kennedy had no opportunity of seeing the girl who was to be the wife of his former school friend. Even amid the gaiety of it all, he was slightly pre-occupied with his sense of wonder at the light in Hilda's eyes. After all, he had forsaken this world of hers, where the temperature was gentle and the sun

kind, where life was gay and leisured. He had exchanged it for a nomadic existence, and chosen to avoid the artificiality of civilization. Hilda remained where she had begun, and he thought her like one of the queens of Provence in the twelfth century, who lived a delicate, romantic life, singing over her tapestry and touched with the faint fragrance of the far-away days of history.

When luncheon was eventually finished he sat for a time with Uncle Richard Joicey, who borrowed twenty pounds from him in the most distinguished manner.

Uncle Richard was a tall, elegant man, with a fine, weak face, and a passion for spending. He had come down from Dublin for the wedding; he was always sympathetic toward lovers and rogues, and said they were the only interesting people left in the world. In his way he was very original and vivid, and he had an easy eloquence. He ran the gamut of all the emotions, and had been a cynic, and then became remorseful and turned pious, and then again cynical, without the smallest idea that he was eternally posturing and never in the least sincere. The smaller accidents of his own existence depressed him considerably, but he never suffered through other people's woes or losses, and Kennedy found himself growing impatient under a protracted flow of clever and shallow small talk.

"We all look to you, Ken, to do something," said Uncle Richard, seated in the deepest and most comfortable chair in the smoking-room. "You will do something, of course."

"I don't know," Kennedy said absently. "I was educated away from the National ideal, and it makes it hard for me to be much more than an outsider."

"I didn't allude to Ireland," Richard Joicey replied, in tones of astonishment; "of course you couldn't possibly take up with the wrong set over here. . . . I

don't believe you could continue your membership at the Kildare Street Club if you did. . . ."

"I've never been inside the place," Kennedy said, with a laugh. "But now and then one gets a vision of a different way of life. Something new, and something which could make one care. Over here, we work ourselves up into a state of frenzy about things which don't really matter. All the sound and fury of political and religious war, and without anything to it."

Uncle Richard shook his head. He liked the idea of his nephew making a name for himself, but he hadn't any suggestions to offer as to how it should be done. To marry well was as good a way as any other, and took less effort. You had only to look at Kenny to realize that he might marry almost any woman with eyes in her head. Uncle Richard dreamed on into a doze after Kennedy had left the room. He had just remembered that he had read in some old book that the people of the Renaissance had two personalities, one which "went to church and loved the King, and one which adored Jupiter and loved Amaryllis," and he had begun a little mental conversation, in which he intended to prove to Kenny that the Irish were very like the Italians, and that he was bound to choose which sect he himself belonged to, though he strongly suspected it was the latter.

Having escaped from Uncle Richard, Kennedy walked out through the square stable-yard at the back of the house, and along a narrow path which led into the woods. The sky had clouded over a little, and there was one huge gap of pale green lying like a lake behind the blue line of the farther hills.

The day had moved very slowly from morning to afternoon, and the earlier glory was less brilliant. Kenny saw the remembered places, at once new and old; and all the softness and even the ripples of cloud, flowing over a sky the colour of green turquoises like fine chiffon scarfs, were as familiar as though the

winds still built up the self-same towers and traceries of cloud as when he had watched them years ago. He left the woods and took his way across the fields on the high land, and here the silence was intense; the river wound its way past the rock, and on westward, faint in colour as a river of dreams. Now and then a bird flew up from the tussocky grasses at his feet, or a company of starlings flew by with their noisy chattering. Everything else was still, as though the day had fallen spellbound, and the low murmur of water made a light, monotonous obligato to the abiding mystery and beauty of the place.

He was following the path to a warm gorse covert in a dell under some scraggy pine trees, which lived an austere life battered by the harsh fury of the winds of winter, the land below curving inwards and forming a tiny bay. There was a wide grass-grown cart track, leading to a gap in a tumbled-down stone wall, where a vigorous old hawthorn tree held its own with a kind of valiant defiance to time, and on a space of lawn, where the grass was nibbled short by stray companies of sheep, a few slender sally trees coloured the landscape with their gorgeous tint of deep, satisfying crimson.

Kennedy had hardly seen a living soul during his walk, but the distant clink of the blacksmith's forge had a friendly and familiar sound, and he sat down, at length, on a fallen tree and watched the trailing clouds, shining now from the light of a low and still hidden sun.

He had not realized how much he was going to feel Hilda's marriage, and, indeed, he had given her very little himself in the way of companionship. Though he knew that it was selfish, he was conscious of a blank feeling—much what the hall of Castle Glenfield might have felt if the symbolic lady with the lamp had been taken from the staircase.

For some reason he had deliberately avoided love,

and the partial loves which had appeared, only to vanish, were hardly as much as definite memories to him. Sometime he, too, might fall under the same spell, and he realized with a sense of slight discomfort that the fidelity which held him to his own friends would force him sooner or later into a passion which would know no change. So far, no woman with the rare, indispensable quality had ever come into his life; as yet she had hidden her mystery from him.

He looked at the crude blue line of the mountains marked along the southern sky, a burning reflection catching the piled clouds above them, and he threw off his introspective mood. It all really meant that he wanted everything to remain unaltered, and that, for his selfish whim, Hil was to forego all the joys and experiences which were hers by every known right.

Aunt Lucy was in the habit of saying that "no one had ever yet died of minding their own business," and he felt that it was intolerable that he should be so much of an egoist. He whistled to Bay, the little Norfolk spaniel who had offered to come and walk with him, and decided to go back to the house. Larry Grove was dining with them that night, and he had to look at Larry with new eyes. In two days' time Teddy Harrington was to come, and then there would be no more time for lonely wandering. Still, this was his first day in Ireland, after a long break, and it had to be treated differently from the other days.

As he got up, he heard a light footstep along the path, and, turning quickly, he saw a girl of about the same age as Hilda coming along the track from the river. She must have come by the stepping-stones. He knew at once that she was Elodie St. Hope, going back to Castle Glenfield.

She was tall and very graceful, so much he recognized at a glance, and that her thick hair was a deep red brown and her eyes grey. All these things were very easy to record of her, and there were probably a



dozen of women whom Kennedy knew who had a far greater claim to beauty, but, as she stopped suddenly and looked at him, Gleeson saw a revelation of an eternal spirit showing through her. She smiled quickly and came towards him, holding out her hand.

"You are Kenny Gleeson," she said. "It is always just a little perplexing to meet some one one has heard of from a dozen different people."

Kennedy took her hand and stood silent. He was thinking of Teddy Harrington, and wondering why Fate had decided that he was to meet her and to impose his dim, wayward personality upon her. What would a girl with eyes like Elodie's really think of Teddy if she knew one quarter of his carefully hidden record? What, indeed?

"Yes," he said, "I am myself. I wish I could say that I was some one more interesting. I have been sitting here realizing that fact for the last half-hour. Bay found me the worst of bad company, but he got a lot of consolation out of the rabbits." He looked at the fallen tree, and thought for a second. "We shall be late for tea if we sit down. Do you mind if you are late for tea?"

Elodie sat down and he took a place on the grass.

"Does it look as if I minded?" she asked.

"I don't pretend I'm a thinker," he said, his eyes lighted and his face touched with his laughing charm; "unless you have the habit of it, it makes one as uncomfortable as a woman in trousers or a man in petticoats, as Aunt Lucy says. Usually I avoid these introspective examinations of things which are best veiled."

"Then why," she said, in a voice that seemed to Kennedy to be like the voice of the woods and the river, speaking in human tones, "why in the world did you do anything so dangerous?"

"Why? It's the place, of course. One lives away

from it, and then, when you come back again, it asks you questions. You must remember," he went on, pulling up little bits of brown-tipped grasses from the ground where he lay, "that I am interviewing my old self, whether I like it or not. This very place where we are sitting, for instance, used to be a corner where I played when I was a nasty, noisy little boy; and then, later on, before I made my first plunge into life, I sat here and imagined that I would do wonderful things. Later on again, when I was home from Oxford, I used to drift here and build castles . . . the only castles I am ever very likely to build, I'm beginning to think."

"And were there no castles to-day?" she asked, in a tone of slight disappointment. "I should like to think that we met just as you had put the finishing touch."

"No, no more castles," he said, shaking his head slowly, and then he raised himself on his arm. "But, look here, this won't do. You and Hilda are the really interesting people just at present. Hil to be married next week, and you and Teddy—when is that to be?"

"Not before next year," she said, looking in front of her.

He noticed the minute change that his words had evoked. Elodie clasped her hands and fixed her eyes upon them, and the heavy half-hoop of diamonds which she wore glittered cold and hard.

"Just the sort of ring Teddy would choose," he commented inwardly; "like every one else's."

"I don't like your ring," he said quickly. "Fancy giving you a ring like that."

He had half-expected her to be angry, but she only looked at him with her eyes a little wide.

"What else would you have had him give me?" she asked.

"Let me think," he replied reflectively. "A bit of

grass would be much better." He went back to his former attitude and began to plait the green strands together. "A ring made out of Ireland's hair. What do you think of that for an idea? It gets rid of Bond Street at once. You can't carry Bond Street about on your hands. There——" he fastened the ends carefully and, taking her hand, slipped the tiny stiff circle on to her little finger, and they both looked at it critically.

"It wouldn't last," she suggested. "It isn't for wear and tear."

"Who wants it to wear or tear? It is symbolic. When it wore out there would be another made for you, and then another—a whole cart-load of rings. Whereas that wretched thing that Teddy paid heaps of money for may get lost or stolen——" he broke off and laughed. "I ought to apologize. I have only just met you, Elodie, and because we both knew each other in the way that we appear to various mutual acquaintances, friends, and relations, I am behaving like a barbarian."

"But then they said you *were* a barbarian—at least Teddy did."

He sat up with his back to her and talked over his shoulder.

"We have gone miles from the point. Tell me what you think about Hil and Larry. Let us gossip for a bit."

"Hil is too good for Larry. But she is too good for any one."

"Poor Hil, what a desperate condition. Still, will she be happy? Will she really be happy in this dear, wonderful country where people get smothered alive and still go on living? Won't she ever want anything else? Will Larry's ambition to be Master of Foxhounds remain his guiding star? Not that it's a bad ambition, but, when one thinks of it——"

"I think you are extraordinarily unreasonable," she

said, watching the back of his head; "why shouldn't they have their own ideas of life?"

"Why? Because they aren't my own, of course." He turned again. "Did you ever know any one who wasn't like that? Any one who was satisfied to let their brothers and sisters, their friends or their enemies alone? Aren't there wild winds blowing somewhere in the world, and aren't there places to see, and all the tumult of life? That's it," he spoke emphatically; "it's tumult that we want."

He looked at her, for he had talked on with the rapid earnestness of sheer conviction, and he was astonished at the change on her sensitive face. She was looking, not at him, but away into the distance, with parted lips and a kind of dim fear in her eyes, and, as she remained silent, he said nothing.

"I'll tell you," she said at last; "I'm afraid of the very thing which you spoke of. Do you know the kind of feeling one gets on a dark night when there is a thunderstorm coming? You wait, and wait, and it doesn't come, but you know it is near"—she was looking him full in the eyes again. "Presently there will be the crash and rage of it all, but not yet. You say that Hil and I are too happy, too secure and too safe, and I have a feeling—please don't laugh at it—that what we have is very transitory, and that some day or some hour it will all be swallowed up and vanish."

She spoke in a low voice, and her sudden emotion was so genuine that Kennedy was bewildered and taken aback; also he was repentant.

He smiled, and spoke in a light, careless tone.

"Everything is going to end some time. There will be tremendous earthquakes and sunquakes, and the stars will be scattered like a handful of dead leaves, and then the strange beasts in Revelation will frolic about and wag their tails." He patted Bay on the head as the little dog came running up. "They'll

bark and speak to the line, old boy, won't they, and chase the rabbits through Saturn and Mars? But you and I will be dead, Elodie, and it won't concern us. Meanwhile, before all that commotion takes place, you and Hil will be married, and it's only my nasty feeling of being left all alone that makes me say mean things. 'And so the poor stone was left all alone.'"

"Have you any notion what the time is?" she asked, getting up quickly. "It's frightfully late."

"Then we'd better come home by the road, it is quicker, if you can face the short cut through the churchyard," he said, as the spaniel jumped round them, uttering sharp, joyful barks.

Bay was always delighted to go out, and equally delighted to go back, for he had a simple heart, and he never wanted anything to be different to what it was.

"Do you suppose I am afraid of ghosts?" she asked.

"I thought you might be"—Kennedy brushed the dry grass from his clothes—"I am myself. That is one reason why I admire Aunt Lucy so much. She lives with them."

## CHAPTER IV

**I**T was growing dusk as they reached the road and walked quickly up a steep hill. The road was very white, and, at rare intervals, little plastered cottages stood out against the sky. The wind had freshened, and there was a glamour along the hills. It was a wonderful evening—so wonderful that neither of them spoke or broke the silence.

On the left of the road, and outside the low park of Castle Glenfield, the little parish church was tucked away in a quiet corner. Its square tower made a home for a whole colony of rooks, who were now returning in noisy and fractious companies after a day in the open. A row of lime trees skirted the western side, and Kennedy and Elodie St. Hope made their way through the inevitable and always handy gap which may be found in almost every Irish wall.

Inside the boundary, a few antiquated yew trees grew at regular intervals, and solid slabs of stone which looked like time-stained tables, put here and there without reference to pattern or design, were on all sides of them. There were very few crosses, as it was considered a sign of a frivolous and Papistical tendency for such a symbol to mark the repose of the dead.

"You are sure that you aren't seeing any apparitions?" Gleeson asked, as he helped her over the loose stones. "They should be harmless enough."

"And you?" she asked, as they stood for a minute.

"I only see those inevitable children, little Kenny and little Hil, waiting for the bell to stop ringing, and leaving it to the last second to get into the queer,

frousty old pew in time for the wicked man to turn away from his wickedness."

"But did he?" she said. "I always wondered who he was."

"I knew, so I have the pull over you there," Kennedy retorted. "He was my uncle Richard Joicey. We had a fable that he was dreadfully wicked. I think in the end, like most sinners, his wickedness turned away from him, most likely."

They crossed the grass, and here and there a white marble monument gleamed ghostly enough in the half-light.

"I knew most of them," Kennedy said, as they went on toward a low gate that opened into the park; "they were very old, and I wonder if it occurs to Aunt Lucy that she will have to be put into the vault with the rest of us, before many years? How cheerful I am, by the way!"

"And you'll be there yourself, sooner or later. I won't be outdone by you, Kennedy, if you want to be morbid."

"Now, that is what you can't possibly know," he objected, as he opened the gate and they passed from consecrated to secular ground once more. "It is one of the really attractive mysteries of life that we haven't the foggiest idea how, when, or where it's got to end. You can arrange when and where you will be married, mademoiselle, but not when or where you will take your ultimate journey."

There were lights in the house as they came up the steps, and Larry's car was drawn up in the bay of the drive. All the other dogs ran out from a dozen different points, barking frantically, and at once there was a sense of noise and movement, and the lamps in the hall seemed dazzlingly strong in contrast to the brown-tinged darkness of the evening outside.

Kennedy had enjoyed himself in a ferocious way,

and his spirits had been touched with a defiant sense of challenge. He had met the only woman who had ever been able to send his blood tingling and thrilling through him with an added sense of life, and she was already bound to a man whom, though he was his friend, he despised thoroughly. It was a curious twist of chance, and his feelings were poignant enough, though, so far, only the first faint heralding of something very much greater had made itself known to him.

The drawing-room was full of people, and Aunt Lucy presided over the tea-table where there was still tea for the late-comers.

Larry Grove, slightly self-conscious and rather awkward, stood by the fire, and Hilda was making herself what her aunt described as "all things in general to no one in particular" through the room. For the world is divided into hostesses and guests, so far as the female side of it is concerned, and Hilda was a born hostess.

When Kennedy had exchanged a few remarks with his future brother-in-law, he came to the tea-table in response to a summons from his aunt.

"Elodie tells me that she found you mooning along the river-side and that you brought her home through the churchyard."

"I believe I did," he admitted. "Was it a sin, Aunt Lucy?"

"A sin?" Listen to his talk. You know more about sin than I do, Kenny, and yet you make a sheep's face at me and ask me nonsensical questions."

Anything less like a sheep than her nephew at that moment could hardly have been imagined, but Aunt Lucy was celebrated for the originality of her descriptions.

"I did something very daring, all the same," he said, looking at her with his clear, smiling blue eyes.



"I not only gave Elodie a ring, but I made it for her myself; and now we don't quite know whether we are informally married or not. It was under the hawthorn, where all the lame and infirm people tie rags on the branches."

Aunt Lucy shook a reproving finger at him.

"Then you have tampered with magic," she said; "a very stupid thing for a man of your age to do. Elodie, my dear, show me your hand."

Elodie looked up from her chair. She had been talking to Frank Northcote, who told endless stories, all going to prove that he did everything better than any one else. His wife sat near and listened with approval. She was a stout woman with a pronounced figure and a tiny waist, which was the astonishment of the young generation. In fact, Etta Northcote looked more like an hour-glass than a woman; and Larry Grove, who occasionally burst into personal criticism, said of her that the only use he could imagine for her was to stand her on the kitchen dresser and boil eggs by her. She and her husband hunted conversationally in couples, and usually attacked the innocent and unwary. They were relatives, and the wide cloak of Irish relationship fell over them and made them a necessity at every family gathering of any note.

When Miss Gleeson spoke Elodie got up and came to the table.

"I asked you to show me your fingers," said Aunt Lucy, as she took the long, well-shaped hands in hers, her quick, penetrating look fixing upon the twisted grass.

"Yes, there it is," said Kennedy.

"You must let it drop off of itself, or it will bring you bad luck," said Miss Gleeson, looking up at Elodie's attentive face. "Ken shouldn't have done it. That was the way that the golden-haired witch enthralled the strangers from the hills."

Elodie's eyes filled with astonishment, and she knelt beside the old lady.

"I think Ireland is the most wonderful place in the world," she said. "You never seem to know what you may be doing when you get there."

"It's an old story," said Miss Gleeson, "and I don't like going against what those who went before me believed in. The strangers came, looking for an earthly paradise; a land of beautiful cities and palaces. I don't know where they came from, my dear, so don't ask me."

"Did they find it?" Elodie asked, and, looking up, she caught Kennedy's amused smile.

"They never found it, because, as they came across the ford below Fox Rock covert, they rested under the white hawthorn tree, and a woman with long plaits of yellow hair met them, and on the finger of every man jack of them she put a ring of grass, and they forgot all else."

"What did the wicked woman do then?" asked Kennedy.

Aunt Lucy shook her head.

"I know nothing more about her. No story which is a real story ever has any end to it. It leaves off in the middle and you have to do the rest of the thinking. But I tell you, Elodie, that you should not meddle with rings made of the grass of a fairy rath; it's unlucky."

"I don't believe in luck," said Kennedy.

Dinner was, like the other meals at Castle Glenfield, quite without prejudice as to time, and it was after eight o'clock when the gathering assembled in the big dining-room. The table was of Spanish mahogany, beautifully polished and six great silver candelabra, with shades the colour of Easter lilies, were set down the centre. The effect was wonderfully good, though, to the critical eye, it was evident that the deep shining colour of the surface had been ill-used, and there were

patches and stains here and there, and the heavy Georgian silver would have been improved by more careful cleaning. Dark portraits and a selection of sporting prints hung on the lofty walls, and there were also masks, brushes, and a fish in a glass case. There was a divine shabbiness about it all that linked it up with all the past generations of Gleesons and mellowed it, like an old picture.

Several other guests had been added to the original party. Jack Foley had turned up unexpectedly, and the local doctor, Aloysius Barry, who attended Miss Gleeson, and was a devoted friend of the family. They were all there to talk. There was no sense of any desire to kill time; no one regarded time as being of special importance. The leisure, the endless, golden leisure of Ireland was with them, and to Kennedy, who looked at it all with the detachment of one who has become an observer, it seemed as though a changeless youth was their heritage. Only Elodie, among all the rest, belonged to a different world, and he could see that she was completely under the spell.

Again and again the question presented itself to him. Would anything ever alter this way of life? Larry Grove had got over his shyness and was talking cheerfully to Aunt Lucy. The conversation was completely and entirely local. They told stories—excellent stories, with a strong appreciation of the dramatic touch—but they were every one of them local. Usually the limits were set by the limits of the county, though Uncle Richard Joicey gave a more cosmopolitan flavour to things by frequent and intimate references to Dublin, the Viceregal Lodge, and people whose names were widely known. Aloysius Barry kept to the village of Castle Glenfield, and Hilda's additions to the talk dealt with a day in Cork, which she described with a vivid and almost passionate touch of humour.

Most of them had done some travelling: Uncle Richard, for instance, had lived a number of years in Paris, but if he had, he had forgotten all about it. Larry had been sent on a tour of inspection right round the world, at the age of twenty, but it passed away like the memory of a dream. All these charming, easy-mannered, and entirely delightful people had forgotten Europe. They were clever, shrewd, and witty; their conversation was never dull, and always original, but they found the most complete fulfilment in themselves and their own things. They all hunted, and much of the talk dealt with that pre-eminent subject; none of them read anything, and, for many of them, the days were simply an opportunity for talk. They reminded Kennedy of the vanished race of letter-writers, who disappeared soon after the arrival of the penny stamp; and they all had any quantity of time. That was the astonishing part of it. The men of the party, who nominally farmed their own properties, usually had agents and stewards who did most of the work for them, and so the gorgeous leisure remained intact.

As dinner went on, Gleeson grew more and more sure of the fact that he himself was hopelessly changed. It was quite easy, now, to look along a vista of years and see Larry and Hil sitting cheerfully at the further end, surrounded by children, and still talking with the racy zest of born raconteurs: Larry, wedded body and soul to Adrigole and the kennels, and Hil still quite unaware that there was anything worth doing outside it all. The Club at Kilvanner, the nearest town of any size; the coming and going of the regiments quartered there; the gaities which followed one upon another, Spring and Summer Shows, the Meets of Hounds through the late autumn and winter, and then the round of Point to Point Races; this made up life, and why in the world couldn't any one be satisfied with it? "What more do you want?"

he asked himself. It was real entertainment, too, and no one needed to be rich or great to join in its open simplicity.

Of course there was another Ireland, the Ireland of political feud and faction; but unless times were bad, which they had ceased to be, this group of happy people were unconcerned about it.

As he talked to Mrs. Northcote, hardly listening to a word she said, and paying small attention to his own answers, he told himself that it was not sufficient. They were selfish, unconsciously, just as he suspected that he himself was consciously selfish. And now he was out of his own group, and had never been able actually to form a part of any other. . . .

He broke off suddenly and looked at Elodie. She was dressed in a vivid shade of green, with gold and fur about it for trimming, and her red-brown hair was full of countless crimps and curls. He could see the line of her young neck, a little too thin for beauty, if one had to be critical; and he knew that she would not be the same when the experimental years were over. Then, life would never leave her alone. Married to Teddy Harrington, who was already waiting with indecent anxiety for his father's death, so that the family property and the title should be his, she would be surrounded by every known form of sham. How she had been duped so far it was impossible to imagine; but Kennedy did not know Teddy as seen from a woman's point of view, and doubtless he could drape himself about with a fictitious glory of some kind or other. Whatever he had done, or however he had done it, he had succeeded in persuading Elodie that she cared about him sufficiently to spend the rest of her life in his company. The idea was hateful to Gleeson, and he had to remind himself that he was Teddy's friend, and that Elodie was nothing to him—nothing except that she was the only woman he had ever felt the same quick interest in, and the same deep

discernment of some quality in her which was fine and even heroic.

Hilda's eyes caught his, down the table, and she smiled her lazy, attractive smile, which was very like his own. She fancied that he must be growing bored, and she knew her brother well enough to realize that he was not in full harmony with his surroundings. Her own wisdom had taught her long before never to want people to be or do anything which did not come naturally to them.

She believed that she knew Larry thoroughly. She read his thoughts, which was perhaps not very difficult, and she understood his love of Adrigole. It was his own, and that meant so much to both of them, for she had to the full the Irish sense of permanence, and a rented house was an abomination. Nearly every one of the people around the table lived in their own houses, except Dr. Aloysius Barry and Uncle Richard, and in her eyes Uncle Richard was very much of a foreigner. Hilda could not have imagined that there was anything in Larry which she did not understand. He was sitting on her left, his fresh, slightly reddened face lighted with pleasure, and his voice, which, in spite of his English schooling, had never lost its native inflection, full of enthusiasm. He was such a dear person, and all the dogs, with the exception of Bay, who sat close to Kenny's chair, were collected round him. They liked the way he handled and played with them, and they knew him for a friend. If you had told Hilda Gleeson that there was something in her future husband which neither of them guessed or dreamed of, they would have both laughed the idea to scorn. What could there be? On the surface you had the sunny landscape and the beauty of lavish possessions—not in the sense of money, for none of them were rich in the accepted meaning of the term, but they were rich for Ireland, and they had that magnificent playing-ground at their disposal.

Later on, when the ladies had gone, they talked of the same subjects, and it was nearly midnight when Larry and Kennedy found themselves alone. Larry wanted to thank Kennedy for a number of things, more especially that he had a sister.

"I think we shall be the happiest people on earth," he said; "Hil loves Adrigole just as much as I do. I'm not one of the wandering Irish, like yourself, old man; I'm content to 'stay put,' as the Yankees say. Oh, we'll have a glorious time, and when old Esmond pegs out, I expect I shall get the Mastership of the South Moyle Hounds"—he ran on into details as to where he could have large enough kennels contrived, and said that he would then give up his own harriers and keep a pack of otter hounds, so that he could hunt summer and winter alike.

The one insistent point in it all was his certainty. Kennedy had become used to making allowances for the fact that Fate had a way of intervening in mid-career, as it were, and he usually guarded his own designs for the future with alternative arrangements. But Larry was above this precaution.

"He talks as if he had a contract with God Almighty," Kenny reflected; but then he had been away so long from them all, and he had forgotten the permeating sense of the enduring nature of prophecy that lived in the very air of the land. Constant repetition of the same acts had made them so strong that they reached away and away into the far future. Why should anything alter? As Larry Grove sat smoking a short, sporting-looking pipe he saw no reason at all to expect changes. So far as he knew himself, he would have sworn on the Bible that he was sure of all that he wanted. Only Kennedy wondered a little, and then he, too, became convinced that life was an easy thing for some people.

## CHAPTER V

**F**OUR days later Teddy Harrington, only son of Sir James Monroe Harrington, arrived at Castle Glenfield.

He was a tall young man with a well-defined waist and a look of superlative smartness. His clothes were always a little out of the ordinary, and he was good-looking in a slight and rather indefinite way. You might single him out easily, because he had a touch of distinction both in outline and manner, and he was engaging enough if he desired to make a good impression. On one side of his immediate ancestry there was money, for his father had made himself; and on the other there was "enough blue blood to float the British Navy," as Aunt Lucy expressed it. The result, in the case of Teddy, was a distinctly marked contempt for his father, combined with a full appreciation of the fact that he was an extremely rich man. Everything he had was expensive, and what it cost to keep Teddy Harrington in the necessities of life represented a considerable sum. He had never done without anything since he had first opened his eyes upon the world, and the only person he really cared deeply for was himself. He was attached to Kennedy, though he frequently criticized him and thought it a pity that he did not go to a better tailor; and he believed that he was in love with Elodie St. Hope. There had been great rejoicings when his engagement was announced, and Lady Gertrude, his mother, "breathed again." She had suffered from so many qualms about Teddy, and during his first year in his regiment she had certainly had very excellent reason for apprehension.



If it was wonderful, and it certainly was, that Elodie had found some attraction in Teddy, it was also, in its way, equally remarkable that he had fallen in love with her. Elodie, with her open simplicity and her subtleties, her quick way of understanding people, and her consideration for others, was so remotely divided from the women who had been her forerunners in the many amorous adventures to which Teddy had given himself, without, albeit, much consideration or consequent remorse. He did what he liked, for had he not always done so? Now he was nominally a reformed character. Even into the stronghold of Castle Glenfield, Teddy brought with him a complete and invulnerable atmosphere of his own. His manservant also contributed his share, and Hil, who knew Teddy of old, and had her own opinion of him, felt that he brought out the stains on the carpet and made the curtains look as though they ought to be taken down and new ones put up instead. He moved normally among people who ranked as the *édition de luxe* ranks in a bookseller's shop, and yet it had all nothing to say to the real Teddy, who was lacking in both brains and power, and who was really considerably lower than the angels. Still the effect was there. It was in his voice, in his sleeve-links, in his manner at all times. His conversation was different to that of the rest of the house party, and it impressed Frank and Etta Northcote tremendously.

Uncle Richard Joicev became once more a pale shadow of the Richard Joicey who had lived in a flat in Paris, and Larry Grove yearned to kick his brother-in-law's old school friend. He, at least, soon discovered his limitations, for Teddy knew literally nothing whatever about hounds, and went so far as to complain of the smell of their food, which was being cooked just about the time when he followed Larry reluctantly round the Adrigole kennels.

It was not in the least that Teddy desired to be out

of sympathy, or to proclaim any special superiority. He was himself, and he could not escape from being what he was. But with his disadvantages he had a lightness and a *débonnaire* way with him that always induced people to reconsider hasty decisions.

During the days before his arrival, Kennedy had neither sought nor avoided Elodie. He was angry with Fate, and was not going to do anything about it. Chance seemed to be having a game with him, for somebody—probably Hilda—arranged that he should take Elodie out in the car, and he found himself with her as though by a right, decided without any reference to him.

It all deepened the dream so cruelly, he realized, and Elodie was not thinking of him. Surely she was not. They had played golf over the links down at Kilvanner, had tea in the hotel that stood in the foreign-looking Square. Sitting by a table in the upstairs coffee-room, they had talked with sudden intimacy, and he had told her that the queer disappointment which he felt towards himself was making him restless.

Outside, in the Square, the carts which had come in for the weekly market were trailing slowly away by the road over the bridge and the roads right and left of the town. The fish-women were still crying "Fresh hake, fresh hake!" in the streets, and Kennedy thought that it was one of those queer little sound-memories which would instinctively linger on so long as he had the power to recall cherished events. They had neither of them spoken of Teddy. It was as though the subject was somehow impossible to them. You couldn't bring Teddy and his effect of pomp into the room where they sat together, for he would have spoilt everything, either as a reality or merely as a thought.

It was when the time came to leave that they had fallen silent, and Kennedy touched her hand.

"My ring has dropped off," he said. and Elodie

made no reply whatever. She sat looking down and remained silent.

"Well, there's no bad luck to fear, in that case," he added, and she looked up at him quickly.

"I don't want you to suppose that I am afraid of things," she said; "I try to believe that I couldn't be afraid."

"You afraid!" he laughed, as their eyes met; "of course not. Courage is a queer thing. It comes and goes, you know. Courage towards life is different. Some people are always cowards: afraid of their neighbours, afraid of their people, afraid of their own shadows; but still they might be able to put up a good fight with their fists if it came their way."

Elodie nodded. "I know," she said. "You find so many who will tell you that they don't care what any one says; but they do care." She broke into a laugh. "What a funny reason, really, for doing or not doing anything. Just because some one you hardly know might talk about it."

They had got away from the mysterious, dangerous ground of silence, and things were normal again. He had driven her home through the lilac twilight, and she had sat beside him in the little two-seater, looking wonderfully happy and content.

"Is it always some one else who makes one do things?" she said, speaking out of a silence; "I don't see how one could do anything alone."

"I expect that's it," he agreed; and then, as though to back her own theory, she quoted in the same abstracted way, as though she was speaking her thoughts aloud:

*Je n'ai jamais été, dans mes jours les plus rares.  
Ou'un banal instrument sous ton archet vainqueur.  
Et, comme un air sonne aux bois creux des guitars,  
Tu fais chanter ton rêve au vide de mon cœur.*

He glanced at her profile. Was she, then, deliberately cruel, or did she not guess?

"Still, there are much worse conditions than loneliness," he said, with a feeling of anger against her. "There's boredom, boredom, and again boredom. Most people, luckily for themselves, are so used to it that they positively enjoy it."

Somehow the mystical link that existed between them had snapped, and they were almost strangers.

Elodie looked at him, turning her head quickly, and then her fair skin flushed and her own eyes changed.

"I didn't mean you," she said; "I think you are quite strong enough to"—she paused—"to storm anywhere. You would never want help from any fellow-creature."

"Thank God, I should not!" he said, his unaccountable anger growing in violence, though he spoke only with rather increased emphasis.

Elodie felt hurt. She had been standing on the threshold of a new kingdom of feeling and sensation, beyond and independent of anything which she had heretofore realized. In actuality she was born a child of light, trammelled a little by the surroundings life had provided her with, and, as yet, without much of the education of experience. She was completely a humanist, and her reason and heart and senses were alive and full of vitality, but, so far, she had found no way of travelling beyond the prescribed limits.

When she met Kennedy she recognized in him at once a responding wave of comprehension. She knew that he had tireless energy, and that through his eyes one might somehow test those limitless resources of humanity. All she admitted to herself was, that here was the incident of a great friendship, a friendship which was wide and free, generous and lavish, and in its exultation capable of a fidelity which would shrink from no sacrifice. Such comradeships were, she believed, to be found, and the spoiling of anything so fair and full of promise by any wretched twist of cross-purpose or misunderstanding was not to be con-

templated. In her dream she based the foundations of an enduring condition on their inward similitude of soul. Perhaps it had even begun long ago, in some other star. Now she was troubled and hurt. The sense of fate, touching some trivial mood and making it grow into a barrier, haunted her; little words like little acts had such an oddly significant place among the great factors which make up human history. Elodie was bewildered, but she conquered her feeling quickly. Naturally, she had the sweetness of disposition which often goes with strength; but she was cast down. What had suddenly become of the friendship which was to have been traditional from its greatness?

Kennedy had lost his gay, careless way, and his face, as she saw it, looked grim and set. They were very nearly back at Castle Glenfield, and that night Teddy was to arrive. She felt no elation of spirit at the thought, and she knew, for she was always honest with herself, that she did not care whether he came or not.

With all the idiotic and yet attractive altruism of her young years she had believed that she could reform Teddy. His mother was devoted to her son, and had used every means in her power to bring about the engagement. Teddy, himself, had made various long confessions of a vague nature, and had asserted that, if she couldn't love him, he would go unhesitatingly along the primrose path to eternal fires.

Looking back upon an affair of the kind, it is very hard to say exactly how the atmosphere is created and how the object is actually secured. Elodie had refused Teddy more times than she could remember, but at last she gave in. The stipulation was that they were to wait for a year at least; there was no dreadful or oppressive sense of doom about it.

Lord Almwroth had told her that he was against the marriage, and her mother, a cousin of Lady Gertrude Harrington, had taken a cautious line. They had all compromised on a year's probation for Teddy,

and so the matter stood. Elodie, with her curious patchwork temperament, which made her see things from quite different standpoints, with a suddenness which was a little disturbing to others, was, in one sense, terribly at the mercy of her own sympathies. She had no respect whatever for Teddy Harrington, but she pitied him desperately. He knew how to arouse her sense of protection perfectly well, and was convinced that she would never forsake him so long as he appealed to her sympathy for the outcast and persecuted. He had not the smallest right to pose as either the one or the other. Far from being an outcast, he was distinctly popular, and any persecution he had suffered arose from having given occasion for blackmail, which could be settled through his lawyers. Still he knew the value of a certain *genre* of threat when you are dealing with an inexperienced idealist, and he used it.

There are two things which should be said about Elodie at this stage of her life: one, that she was sufficiently egotistical and also sufficiently vain to be attracted by the rôle of "soul's saviour" to a waster; and, secondly, that she had not had any real experience of life. She had been watched over by an adoring mother, spoiled—as far as a very simple and direct character may be spoiled—by her father, and she had never had to do without anything she wanted. She was quite clever enough through instinct to know that life requires hardness, and out of a kind of natural tendency to make good the omission, she hugged the notion of sacrifice. She hadn't a quarter of Hilda's quiet *savoir vivre*, and she had much more to learn.

Then, "after that tricksey way Fate has," as Aunt Lucy expressed it, she met Kennedy Gleeson, and at once every quality she possessed became alive and vivid. She could not escape from the thought of him, and the notion of compromise, which was one that she had been brought up to accept, cast its veil over

facts. Had Elodie said boldly to herself, "I am in love with this man," and discarded the pretext of friendship, it might have been infinitely better for all three of the people concerned; but she did not realize that it was the case. She wanted him to be her friend, and she saw that she had only known him a few short days. The old, worn-out convention which decrees that the people whom you have known longest are those you know best, was responsible for this mistake. She had known Teddy since they were children, and Kennedy—a week ago she had only known what the others had to say about him.

Now Kennedy was annoyed with her, and she minded it acutely. She felt her own nerves beginning to tingle. It is one of the compliments we pay to those we really love that we become far more angry with them than with other people. At first she had thought of trying to bridge over the gulf across which Gleeson's statement, that he thanked his God that he wanted nothing from any man, still rang, but she decided against this.

Teddy had said that Kenny Gleeson had the nastiest temper of any man he knew, once you got on the wrong side of him. It seemed ridiculously easy to get on that wrong side.

"What have I done?" she asked at last, chiefly because she couldn't bear the silence and felt like picking a quarrel.

"If I could tell you that I could tell you a number of things I don't know," he replied, turning the car in at the big entrance gates; "sometimes the utter stupidity of life as it is puts one in revolt. What are we all doing? And you and I, Elodie, what are we playing at?"

"I don't know," she replied, slowly echoing his own words as she got out of the car; and at the top of the steps Teddy was standing waiting for her.

They met as two well-bred and quite indifferent

people might meet, and Kennedy took the car round to the stables in a fine rage. He cursed everything and every one, and kept out of the way until it was time to dress for dinner; and even then he was late, for he met Hilda on the staircase in a shimmer of white, like a ghost.

"Oh, Ken," she said, "do you know what was the first thing Teddy asked me when he got inside the house?"

"No," said Kennedy abruptly, but he put his hand on her arm and softened the hardness of his voice with a light, affectionate touch.

"That I should invite the Ransomes down for the wedding."

"Well?" he asked.

"Major Ransome is in Teddy's regiment, and his wife is the wonder of Cork. Of course you don't know all these facts of local interest. She is really very beautiful, but—well, she isn't our sort. I thought Teddy seemed very anxious I should ask them——"

"Oh, ask them. What does it matter, anyway? You'd put them up for a night, I suppose?"

"Yes, we could do that. It wasn't that I was thinking of."

He led her to the dim window at the end of the passage.

"Then what were you thinking of?"

"Only that, as he is engaged to Elodie, I felt that—I expect it's all rather silly—but of late Teddy has been everywhere with Mrs. Ransome."

Kennedy was silent. He was well aware of the fact that Teddy's friendships were distinctly open to suggestion.

"Don't arrange to do anything yet," he said quietly; "I haven't seen Teddy. Perhaps when I do I shall be able to advise you, Hil."

Hilda swung the blind-cord to and fro.



"It might cure her," she said; and through the darkness her eyes searched her brother's face. Hilda knew quite well, and like almost every woman she had a secret love of intrigue. "I thought I'd speak of it to you, Ken; Elodie is so much too good for him."

The sound of a door opening further up the passage made her turn, and she pressed Kenny's hand against her face and ran down the wide staircase.

## CHAPTER VI

**O**N that evening the party was considerably smaller, as the Northcotes and Uncle Richard Joicey had gone to dine with the Killineys, who had a large place to which they came at grave and stated intervals. Aunt Lucy was indisposed, and the little party of four sat at the large table together. Larry was coming in later in the evening.

Dinner went through quite cheerfully, and Teddy appeared to be in high spirits. He ate his food with the air of a connoisseur who is not altogether satisfied, and he rallied Hilda about her wedding throughout the meal.

In spite of the fact that, of all the four present, Teddy was unquestionably the least and lowest, he was, as is often the case, able to influence the atmosphere. When he was in good form he conveyed a kind of gilded rag-time effect to every subject he touched, and Kennedy, who was doing his best to be a genial host, tried to recall his former feeling of half amiable tolerance towards his erstwhile friend.

Whereas the other men who came to the house talked sport, Harrington talked scandal. He had a close and intimate knowledge of the private lives of people who were socially well in the limelight, and he had a light and quite amusing way of revealing their weaknesses. The main trouble for Teddy was, that he had no gods. There wasn't the least possible fraction of an ideal anywhere in his view of life, and he judged others by his own sordid standard. Yet he looked well, and his fine, weak face was delicate in its

lines, though it might easily become fretful and unlovely under any disappointment or strain. He could hold his own with the Irishmen in the hunting-field, and he was a moderately good shot, though Kenny, who had no love for feather-shooting, regarded Harrington's exploits with veiled contempt.

Sport, to him, was a service of danger, and it required the austerity of a Trappist. He had eaten food which Harrington would hardly have considered fit for his dogs, taught himself to do without cigarettes, and drunk nothing stronger than the water from the nearest spring. He had slept in the open, gone unshaven for weeks, and had tramped, as the pilgrims of old had tramped the world, to seek some far-away shrine. All this for sport, because sport was the one thing which offered him some of the rewards which he valued. But, to sit at a covert side, where lunch was brought out in baskets by men-servants, and shoot driven birds, represented a base and unworthy form of a game which should be played only by men who were prepared to stand the necessary training.

Where he sat he could see on the further wall the proud heads of two of the best *Bara Sing* which had ever fallen to a single rifle; and he knew, with the odd contradictiousness which frequently makes a true sportsman an intense lover of animals, that he prized them because he had earned them so thoroughly. Behind him there was a fine *Ovis Ammon* which took a second place in the world's record list for its spread of horns, shape and beauty. He had earned that, too, and faced perishing cold and long exposure to gain it. Meanwhile, Teddy Harrington beguiled the ears of his hearers with accounts of his own doings. He seemed to be proud of Elodie, and there was a quite evident air of possession in his manner toward her.

She, for her part, had retired into a kind of feminine fastness, and what her dreams might be, it was impossible to guess.

Hilda was her simple, natural self. She laughed at Teddy and poked fun at him in a way which, though certainly pointed, was good-humoured and spontaneous. It was, as he said, difficult to get any change out of Hil, and her wits were well awake.

"Do leave some one with a rag to their back," she said, when he had disposed of a few more of his fashionable friends. "All one can say is, that I'm glad we aren't in society, Teddy; none of us are nearly bad enough to get in there. To have a few illusions is to admit oneself out of things." She got up and took Elodie's arm. "How have you escaped?" she asked, with a laugh, "or is he only pulling my leg just because I am a country cousin?"

"I wasn't listening," Elodie said, without looking back at Teddy, who evidently expected that little tribute as she left the room, "I was thinking of something else, far more interesting."

"And what was that?" asked Hil, but the answer was lost to Kennedy, as he closed the door behind them.

When he walked back to the table Harrington had filled his glass again and was smiling at the peach on his plate. Kennedy realized that Teddy was likely to become communicative, and he wondered how he was going to endure an hour of sentimental confidence as to the state of his feelings with regard to Elodie. Patience, unless taken in connection with sport, was not by any means a marked characteristic of Kennedy Gleeson, and, at that moment, he felt a most uncontrolled desire to knock his guest over the head and leave him under the table. His own sense of having lived an empty existence was tempered for him by comparison, and the contented futility of Teddy Harrington presented a problem to his mind.

"What sort of use are you, anyhow?" was the question he desired to ask; but he knew that Teddy

would only retort that at least he was a soldier by profession, and that Kennedy hadn't even that claim to put forward. After a minute or two of silence the flood-gates parted and Harrington began to talk.

He regarded Kennedy as his oldest friend, and though he was not prepared to do anything whatever to back his assertion, he considered that it was part of their vague contract to be able to utter confidences, if one was in the mood. Kennedy had expected raptures; Teddy was wonderfully good at rhapsodizing about his feelings, and they came, sure enough, but—and Kennedy felt the contraction around his heart grow less acute—they had no reference whatever to Elodie.

A man, so Teddy explained, had to settle down. You wanted, as he put it, sooner or later, to "live in your own place and breed your own children." Everybody did it after a time. It was natural, fitting and suitable; and unless you were a fool you chose your wife with a certain amount of care. Elodie, for instance, wouldn't be likely to let you down, and they got on quite well together. This he admitted, with a patronizing touch, as of tribute to the qualities which he recognized in her; but, in reality, he wanted to point out to Kennedy that, when it came to contracts, he was no fool. Meanwhile, he explained, since "Ken, old boy, you know so little about *les femmes*," there were distinct advantages about being openly engaged.

Using a strong effort to control himself, and shoving the port round to Teddy once more, Kennedy inquired as to the precise nature of the gain, other than the fact that it indicated that you had got what you wanted.

Teddy was quite ready to tell Kennedy. At that very moment he was having a remarkably good time. The Ransomes had come to the regiment.

"You remember the Ransome affair, of course?" he asked.

Gleeson said that he did not, and it transpired that he had been in the Rockies at the time.

"Well, it was a nine days' wonder. Ransome ran off with Edith Grey, and he had to leave the regiment. It's blown over now, and they have come back. Edie was always a most wayward and attractive woman." He continued a lengthy description of her record, and concluded by more than hinting at the free and happy condition of affairs existing between them.

Kennedy's blue eyes grew as cold as ice, and he looked at the flushed face of the man who sat so near him eating his bread, and nominally his friend.

"I can't follow your theory with regard to the advantages of being engaged—considering the circumstances," he said.

"Ken, you old ass, you really are the limit." Harrington gave a high, thin laugh of scorn. "Maxie Ransome is devoted to Edie. He went a-mucker solely and simply on her account, and he is jealous. He suspects every man who comes to the house, and makes her poor life miserable. The reason I get there on a kind of free pass is because I'm considered safe. An engaged man is a kind of chaperon. Now do you see?" Again he repeated his high, thin laugh that was a kind of parody of real mirth.

"I think you're a dirty blackguard," said Kennedy fiercely. "How you can show your head I can't imagine. I suppose Ransome is a friend of yours?"

Harrington laughed again. He was amused by Kennedy. "It's done every day," he said, by no means affronted at Gleeson's outburst.

And then the devil tempted Kenny. Perhaps he had been waiting unseen at his elbow all through dinner to do so, but certainly at that moment, being well aware of the psychological conditions, he made a definite offer to Kennedy Gleeson. At any rate, a thought which he should not have entertained came to him with a leap, and the violence of its coming

was so great that he remained silent. If he had adhered strictly to his own beliefs he would have told Teddy that he must clear out on the spot, and that he would be no party to the ugly fraud which was being perpetrated upon two innocent people. It was all so base and so abominable that no compromise was possible. Gleeson knew nothing of Maxie Ransome, but there was Elodie. Elodie with her sweet face which was like a dream, and all the magic of her eyes and hair. He should have championed her there and then, but he realized that even so, Harrington, who was a good liar, might counter his attack.

The expression on Gleeson's face altered, and he looked less hostile. He lighted a cigarette and began to fiddle with the crumbs beside his plate.

Supposing he let things rip? There was no reason why he should not do so. Teddy had suggested that the Ransomes were to be invited for the wedding, and Kennedy thought of the junction such a meeting would form. Surely he deserved to come to disaster; and should Kennedy forestall the climax and make himself unpleasant, he might also entirely frustrate the ultimate conclusion of this wretched entanglement, which chained Elodie to such a contemptible creature. As he saw it, Fate must be permitted to take a hand, and all he need do would be to appear amiable.

Unfortunately, in a way, Teddy Harrington had let him into the secret of facts, because he could never be counted upon to hold his tongue about his doings. He had told Kennedy far too much, and put him in an awkward corner; but as Gleeson reviewed the situation swiftly he foresaw a great possibility involved in it, if he left it alone. Edith Ransome was to be a liberator. So long as she was kept away she and Elodie might quite conceivably never meet, and the sound and noise of possible chatter would reach her ears last of any. No one would tell her what Harrington was doing; and as for Ransome, if he was

already blinded by so thin a subterfuge as that of Teddy's engagement, the sooner he saw that he was being duped the better for him. Logically, there could be no better method of arriving at a *dénouement* of the tangle. The light of the shaded candles fell upon Kenny's bent head and touched his wavy hair. He did not look up. Harrington was talking again. He was wonderfully glib and ready, and he was making good his own case. As he saw it, he was doing nothing that mattered, and his heart was in the right place.

"I always realize that Elodie is the only woman I ever wanted to marry. My people like it; and, once we are married, I shan't give her the smallest trouble," he said, with a gesture of wide toleration. "A few wild oats never did any harm. I am always really faithful to her at heart."

Kennedy looked up and laughed.

"It's no matter what you do  
If your heart is only true—

And his heart was true to Poll," he quoted. "I can't say that I understand your theory, Ted, it is too subtle for me. If I were unlucky enough to be in love I should not want to be bothered with the others."

"You," Harrington shrugged his well-made shoulders, "you are an Esau. All you care about can be packed in a rifle-case. It's simple, but then you haven't got temperament."

"Hil tells me," Gleeson said slowly, "that you want to get this Edith of yours down here for the wedding."

"By George, I do, old boy." Harrington spoke eagerly. "It would be a doocid good move. You don't see anything against it, do you?"

"I don't," Kennedy said, and again he looked down. It was never very easy for him to make any kind of pretence, and he felt uncomfortable, though he sat quite still, looking wonderfully sure and controlled.



All his life he had been a good gambler, and just then he was gambling pretty heavily.

"Well, if you don't, I don't think Hil will."

Kennedy pushed back his chair and got up.

"Let's join the others," he said briefly.

The rest of the evening was passed in the drawing-room, where, in a corner near the window, Larry, Kennedy, and Teddy, with Elodie for a fourth, played bridge. In the middle of the second rubber Frank and Etta Northcote came in. They had driven eight miles in all, to dine with the Killineys, and, so far as their report upon their evening could be relied upon, they had done little else but abuse the Bishop. What the Bishop had done to get himself so thoroughly into the bad books of Lord and Lady Killiney they did not know, but, out of politeness, they, too, had joined in the protest. It was comfortable, in its way, to abuse a recognized authority.

"But the Bishop is a dear," protested Hil, who was always a loyal adherent. "It's a great shame to abuse him."

"Well, my dear," objected Frank Northcote, "he may have done many things we all know nothing about. In any case it is very difficult to contradict Killiney—and at his own table."

"I said all I could," Etta remarked plaintively. "I was not really interested. I always say kind things."

"Who else was there?" asked Hilda, who was always interested in functions of any kind, and a long description followed of the other people present.

In the middle of it all, the bridge party being broken up, Kennedy caught Elodie's eye, and they exchanged a glance of mutual comprehension. The Northcotes, who were quiet and well-bred people, were so obviously impressed by the Killineys that they still felt the distant backwash of their greatness. In reality,

Lord Killiney was a dull old gentleman with a tremendous conceit of himself, and Lady Killiney a chattering and tiresome type of enthusiast, who was strongly addicted to fads. Yet, because they stood for so much in the county, the Northcotes, who lived on the furthest borders to the west, were under a delusion about them. To be able to go to St. Helen's, to be asked to dine there (even if it were only to make one of a party who abused the Bishop) was in itself a thing to allude to constantly in subsequent conversations. If you didn't know the Killineys, had you all the graces and virtues, you were little more than an outcast, whereas, if you actually got so far as to be invited to stay, it was a form of social promotion. The numbers of charity entertainments which might otherwise have languished, and existed because Lady Killiney could be invited to open them, were countless; and people sat on committees for the sole purpose of becoming one of the elect.

Looked at from a detached point of view, it seemed like a form of insanity, but, regarded from within, the situation assumed plumes and feathers.

Neither Frank nor Etta had really enjoyed themselves at all; but you didn't go to St. Helen's to enjoy things, you went so that you could say you had been there. It was much the same as going down a mine or being lowered in a diving-bell; not the least amusing, but capable of being used as a conversational standing-dish. When the worthy and elderly pair returned again to their "*terres*" in Camolen they would have the wedding to talk about, but far more than the wedding, even though Lord and Lady Killiney were invited and had accepted, there would be that dinner-party.

"Good God," Kennedy said to himself, as he caught Elodie's glance, and he looked at Teddy who was building a card-house in the centre of the bridge table.

"I was staying at St. Helen's for the first shoot,"

Harrington remarked; and, obviously, Frank Northcote thought more of the young man on the spot.

"Oh," he said, "oh," and then again, "oh. *Staying* at St. Helen's!"

"Did they invite you, Ken?" Etta demanded, her family pride stung into sudden life. She knew that Kennedy was a celebrated shot, and that his record for big game was a great thing. She was jealous for the name and fame of the Gleesons.

"No, they did not," he said lazily; "and, if they had, I should not have gone, Cousin Etta. I'm leaving Ireland directly after the wedding."

## CHAPTER VII

**I**T was not at all difficult to understand Edith Ransome's fascination. She was strikingly good-looking, with large dark eyes, dark hair, and a perfect complexion which owed nothing at all to art. Her clothes were the very excelsis of good taste, and she held herself well. She looked strong and rather intense, but her manner to those of her own sex was not encouraging. For one thing, though she was prepared to give her attention to the dulllest of men, she never listened to anything a woman had to say. Edith had specialized in men from the time she was fourteen, or even before then, and now she was something over thirty.

In her heart she harboured one living fear, and that was the fear of growing old. She had really rather lost her first ardours of the chase, and she now regarded her quarry with slightly different eyes. If a man did not respond to her wonderful and subtle attack she felt anxious and uneasy; it was as though she saw the beginning of that dreary time when she would no longer be all-conquering.

Naturally intended to be a fastidious woman, she had so grown into the habit of conquest that she cared very little what she conquered. "Love" had become a form of stimulant, and without it she could not live.

Once she had adored Maxie, and probably she still cared for him a good deal. He, too, was good-looking in a rather ineffectual way, but he could not hold her changing fancy, and his outbursts of jealousy only added a spice of adventure to affairs such as she was at that moment engaged upon with Teddy Harrington. The trouble about Edie was that she looked so

much too good for the ignoble form of pastime in which she indulged herself, and yet there was no end to it. She could talk beautifully, and she read a good deal. You couldn't accuse her of being empty-headed and vain, but all this promise only fulfilled itself in the wretched performance of adding scalp to scalp. She had nothing really left to give to any living soul.

In figure she was lithe, healthy and graceful, and she did most things well. The old scandal which still hung about her was to her a matter of complete indifference, and her hardness was adamant. She was wholly selfish, and her imagination was set into a concrete state of egotism. Knowing herself to be unpopular with women she never bothered about them, and her indifference created for her a whole crop of adversaries. Besides this she was lawless, and celebrated for her desire to interfere between accredited lovers. She was often bitter and angry about life, because she had never yet got anything she wanted, or rather, once she got anything, she ceased to desire it further. Cork and Cork County had talked of her until there was literally nothing further to say, but her social status carried her over the bar prohibitive; and her father, who was a kinsman of Lord Killiney, had during his life-time regarded the conveniences with the same scanty respect as his beautiful daughter. No one could refuse to accept Mrs. Ransome; did she not "stay at St. Helen's"?

Maxie Ransome was a rich man and their *entourage* was perfection. Cork might say what it liked behind Edith's well-bred back, but to her face the inhabitants were scrupulously polite and amiable.

"People in that set, you know——" was the formula of the excuse for the frequent efforts which the social rulers of City and County made for themselves when they attempted to induce the Ransomes to dine or dance in their houses, and Edith was unhesitatingly and equally rude and discouraging to them

all alike. If any one had the audacity to imagine that she was going to hobnob with small provincial magnates they were liable to receive a rather unpleasant surprise. She hardly troubled to return their calls, and in the hunting-field she held a kind of court at the covert side. Now and then she pounced upon a presentable looking man of the locality, for the fun of turning his head, but otherwise she ignored them to a great extent. She had made herself felt, to a most remarkable degree, and usually had some ultra smart friends staying at "The Brambles," which was the name of the large villa Maxie had taken when he rejoined his regiment once more.

Some of the more daring of the established families who suffered from her insolence decided to cut her, but when they did, it was such a moot point whether they or she had committed the act of severance that there was very little pleasure to be got out of it.

Hilda knew all these things quite well, and she felt a little doubtful as to what her own treatment from the hands of the notorious Mrs. Ransome was likely to be, though she did not really care. Teddy had guaranteed that she would accept the invitation, which she did, by wire, as she rarely troubled to write letters of politeness, and they arrived in a car of the latest and most expensive of patterns, and brought with them an effect of so much style that they and Teddy between them made the place "feel quite English," as Hil put it.

Edith's clothes turned Hil's trousseau, which was packed into a couple of long trunks, save and except for her wedding-dress and a coat and skirt of serviceable pattern, into the merest rags. No one could attempt to compete with Edith in the matter of frocks and hats, and every detail of her appearance was fine and finished. She was quite charming to Hilda at once, and very much less so to Elodie, whom she seemed to dismiss.

Elodie was interested in her; all other women were for that matter, but Elodie saw her as Teddy's friend, married to a senior officer of his regiment; and, among these people, she still believed she was one day going to live.

Harrington had explained that he must look after Mrs. Ransome, and so it appeared natural enough for him to take her off at once after tea to see the view from the top of the rock, and Kenny made good the deficiency by taking Elodie to Adrigole to look at hounds.

"Don't you think Mrs. Ransome very beautiful?" she asked, as they walked down the short-cut to Larry Grove's property.

"Yes, I do," he said, looking away over the deep shining of the river below. "But I don't like her."

"She likes you," remarked Elodie, with a curious little touch of temper in her voice, though she could not justly convict him of having done anything in particular.

"She also likes Teddy," he replied. "She'll like Larry when she meets him. She may even go so far as to like Mr. Watt when he crosses the horizon. There is no limit set."

Elodie said nothing. She had felt as though something had suddenly gone out of the days; some charm, some fragrance had been lost. Mrs. Ransome did like Kennedy, and Elodie, who felt no sort of mistrust of her when she and Teddy went out together, was oddly uncomfortable in spirit as she thought that certainly this new arrival would try all her arts upon Kennedy. He would take her into dinner, and she herself would sit some distance away. Why should one mind these things, when they have no real reference to life? Why indeed?

"What do you think of Major Ransome?" she asked, as Kenny helped her over a low stile.

"I don't think about him." Kennedy stood still and looked down at her face. He wanted so desperately to

take her in his arms and tell her that he had only one thought. "Why should I? They aren't my sort of people, either of them. I believe," he laughed, "that they are made of papier-mâché. They look awfully well, but if you leave them out in the rain they come back pulp."

Elodie felt wonderfully gladdened by this assertion.

"I think she is beautiful," she repeated, feeling that if she did not go on saying it she would stand accused of feminine spite.

"Let her be." Kenny and she were walking on together again. "What waste of time to talk of her at all. Don't you realize that I am going away, and that I am not coming back? That, years hence, when I do, you will have evolved into quite a different person, and I may be, too. We shall never be the same, you and I, together in Ireland."

A sense of the anguish of all he was losing rushed over him, and he could not quite keep it out of his voice.

"I shan't change," she said in a low, troubled voice.

"Do you think it is Ireland which makes one so unsettled? Do you think that there are strange gleams and glimpses to be seen here that turn everything else into shadows? Or are we the shadows?" he suggested, and somehow, before he knew it, he had taken her hand, and they walked on together like two children. "I want at any rate to thank you, Elodie, for having helped me to see some of those gleams."

And then he remembered the half-hoop of diamonds, and he let her fingers drop. Whatever he decided to do about letting Teddy dree his own weird, and himself bring about the ending of the engagement, Kenny knew he could not have the smallest right to press his own claim. He saw that he must watch himself and take no risks. In the short time during which he had known her Elodie had never looked so precious in his



eyes, and she smiled at him frankly as their hands parted.

"You too," she said in her wonderfully flexible voice, "you have made a new opening in the woods for me. I can see the faint outline of the town Aunt Lucy told us about. The land the strangers came here to search for. We may even get there——" Her lips parted and she raised her face, as though in reality she looked out toward the earthly paradise. And perhaps she did see it. Elodie was only twenty-three, and at that age these visions are wonderfully real. She had forgotten all about Teddy, who at that moment was sitting at the foot of Fox Rock in a sheltered spot with Edith, making extremely modern love to her. They had been discussing Elodie, and Mrs. Ransome had told Harrington that she would "do very well, to marry"; and Teddy had asked her whether it was necessary to climb the hill to look at the beastly view, or whether it could be ignored, and they decided to ignore it.

"Shall we get there? I doubt it," Kennedy replied.

They were on the winding path above Adrigole now, and the stables were not far off. In the stables they were sure to find Larry, and he would walk back with them. There would be no more chance of any further talk, and every word became dear, out of its rarity.

The touch of Elodie's fingers had added to the sense of the unfading charm of the day, and, in spite of everything, Kennedy felt happy.

"Why should one doubt it?" she asked inconsequently enough under the circumstances, looking to where the roof and chimneys of Adrigole rose out of the green of the elms and limes which surrounded it, sheltering it from the winds. The sun touched the gilded weather-cock on the stables, making it shine like a little spear, and this point held her glance.

"If I said why, it would all be out of keeping with

your mood and with my own. There is no earthly paradise, except the one we make for ourselves, and you won't find yours here. Mine," he went on, "is in a place I can't get to. Let's call it the Everglades of Florida, so as to be geographically exact. The name of that place has haunted me like music for years, but I don't want to go there, except in moments of enthusiasm."

"Yet," said Elodie with quiet deliberation, "just below us is some one else's paradise—Adrigole."

"And here is the owner of the place," Kennedy continued with a light laugh. "How much does he understand, mademoiselle? The gods are kind to him."

"Oh, let them be happy," she said passionately; "why can't you let them be happy? It mayn't last, or it may seem just a quiet, humdrum business to others, but I want Hil to be happy."

She spoke with so much feeling that Kennedy was startled, and he laid his hand on her arm.

"If I had the giving of happiness, who else would I rather give it to?" he asked a little reproachfully. "Do you really fancy that I could grudge them anything?"

"No," she said; she smiled, her eyes filled with quick tears; "only you seem to feel that nothing is going to last as it is."

"And it is not," he said with a touch of retort, for he wanted her to steady herself before Larry joined them. "Better things will come; why should they not? But it can't be the same."

Elodie was quite right when she said that Edith Ransome liked Kennedy. She made no secret of it, and, in the invincible sureness of her own success, she began the weary old game all over again, at dinner.

She was dressed in a beautiful garment that hardly looked as if any earthly dressmaker had designed it,

and her heavy black hair was piled on her head with the most perfect reference to the balance of her profile. Aunt Lucy, who had recovered from her migraine, or whatever it was which had kept her in her room, was in her old place at the head of the table, and she considered Mrs. Ransome for a time. Edith was not gracious to the old; she detested age, and she thought of Aunt Lucy as a skeleton at the feast. Uncle Richard Joicey, who was struck all of a heap by her on sight, she decided to tolerate, and made some remarks to him in her careless, casual way; and she had a smile for Larry. Hilda she still appeared to regard as a human being, and she liked her even better than at first, though her first impression had been favourable; but then, everybody loved Hil. But there was no doubt that the coming of the Ransomes had unsettled the atmosphere.

Maxie, who thought Hilda delightful, was perfectly happy to sit between her and Elodie. He had no admiration for Elodie because she had red hair, and his wife's was dark, and he had taken one of his usual dislikes to Kennedy, because he could read the signs of the times, and, though not quite so much of a fool as Teddy supposed him to be, he knew the look of danger. Teddy was not dangerous, but if Kennedy responded to the interest Edie was exhibiting, he might be even a disaster. Maxie Ransome was in the awkward position of one who had to hate a man because he admired his wife, and equally he felt affronted and angry if no such sign were evident. However, he made himself entirely agreeable to his hostess, and even spoke to Aunt Lucy, raising his voice, because he thought that at her age she must be deaf.

At the further end of the table Edith was working things up after her own special fashion. She had interested Larry, and she behaved exactly as though there were only herself, Grove, and Kennedy present. She called them both by their Christian names in her

well-bred voice; borrowed Larry's handkerchief, as she said she had forgotten her own, and started spinning bread tee-totums against Kennedy, until Maxie and Teddy were both disturbed and dissatisfied. She was spoiling everything for every one; for even Hilda did not exactly like the buccanneering way in which Edith looked at her future husband, and Elodie felt that Kennedy must be encouraging her, or she could hardly be so over friendly, all in such a short time. Teddy knew her ways, but he was equally aware, through this knowledge, that she was interested in Gleeson, and he longed for dinner to be over and for the moment to come when he could get Edith to himself for a time. Maxie was going through no more than his usual martyrdom, and neither Larry nor Kennedy cared in the least for the beautiful-looking woman who was taking so much trouble to amuse and interest them. But could Edith cease her syren song? Certainly not. In this instance, too, she was really anxious to sing it. Where had she ever seen eyes like those stern and kind blue eyes of Kennedy's before? Not ever, that she could remember. Suppose that they were to light up with passion? Until you have seen eyes so lighted, you have never really seen them at all. She dallied with the thought, and gradually she more or less ignored Lawrence Grove and gave her whole attention to Gleeson. Edith Ransome could talk well; she used her conversations over and over again, but still they were interesting, and also she was capable of originality. All the best in her qualities came uppermost as she looked at Kenny's face with her deeply interested brown eyes. She told herself that here was a man with the right to command fidelity; the type of man who could make other lovers an impossibility. How did one arrive at making him care—getting behind those outer defences?

After dinner she asked Kennedy to take her away from the others, more especially Aunt Lucy, who, she

said, had already alarmed her when they all sat together in the drawing-room before dinner.

"Do you know what she said to me?" Edith asked, as Kennedy, who did not in the least want to take her away, stood faced by a difficulty.

"Aunt Lucy usually speaks her mind, without the smallest reference to politeness. I've suffered myself that way——"

"No, not quite that." Mrs. Ransome laid her fingers on Kenny's sleeve. "She merely said, 'My good girl, you're wasting your time,' and left it at that. She meant, of course, that you don't want women friends."

"I certainly have none," he said in tones of relief. Would not Hil, or Elodie, or Teddy, who was responsible for Mrs. Ransome, come and deliver him from having to spend the rest of the evening with her? She was talking again, and in a moment he knew that he would be sitting on the low seat under the mythical lady on the staircase beside her. It was absurd to be so weak; but then against that Kennedy felt it impossible to snub a woman, and besides, Mrs. Ransome was quite charming, only he didn't want her. He wanted to find Elodie, who was far away, her head hidden, ostrich-like, behind a book.

"Kennedy," Aunt Lucy's voice reached him in his dilemma, like a rope flung to a poor swimmer. "I'd be obliged if you'd give me your arm up to my room." She had never made such a request before in all the years he had known her, but he was duly grateful.

"I don't like Mrs. Ransome," she said, as they parted at her door, "she's one of those free-lances we read about—and the brazen face of her!"

The rest of the evening went wrong all through. By the time Kenny got back to the drawing-room Elodie had vanished, and he fell into the clutches of Uncle Richard Joicey, who was in a reminiscent mood,

and talked about the Paris of his young days, and of restaurants where he used to dine, and the *bal* where he used to dance. Uncle Richard was calling up ghosts by the dozen, and something in the turn of Edith Ransome's graceful head had brought back a memory of Hortense, Julie, Marcelle, and many others. He felt sentimental and wanted a sympathetic ear.

"It is such nonsense to suppose that a man may not regret a lost mistress just as much as an early love whom he might have married," Uncle Richard remarked in a lowered voice. These theories, like his memories, were of Paris and did not transplant well into the atmosphere of Cork County. He was telling Kenny that he might have married the present Lady Killiney, but the romance died young; instead, he had found most of what he wanted in Paris. He waxed enthusiastic as he recalled evenings at the Élysée, and how the dawn had caught him still there, drinking absinthe and smoking cigarettes under the chestnut trees, his hand clasping the hand of—oh, any of them, for they were all charming, and he loved them all.

To Kennedy the confidences were entirely lacking in interest, he could not bring himself to feel any special sympathy with these shadows,—wan ghosts of Uncle Richard Joicey's past which the line of Edith's neck, and some little trick she had when she looked at you, recalled very vividly to the dreamer himself.

"For myself, I abandoned the idea of marriage long ago. Mrs. Ransome is superb—superb."

When Uncle Richard was eventually got off to bed Ken was still under the same necessity, or so it seemed, to listen indefinitely.

Maxie Ransome, who appeared to have exonerated Gleeson from any designs upon his wife, caught him as he left the smoking-room in the vain hope that Elodie might have come down again and be in the drawing-room. She had not come, and Maxie wanted a listener, so Kennedy resigned himself to his fate.

Major Ransome considered that there was one subject of which you could talk unceasingly. He was a moderate polo-player, and the length of his purse made it easy for him to have a string of the best ponies which money could buy; but he had never yet done more than play in regimental matches, and had not been singled out for special distinction—in fact he had been passed over. It is by no means easy, as the great Authority has said, for any man to bear an imputation upon his horsemanship, and the fact stuck in Ransome's mind like a thorn under the finger nail.

"It isn't as if I couldn't ride, or as if I couldn't hit a long ball," he said impatiently. "I'm every bit as good at shots as Herky Beaumont, the Captain, but there's so much damned personal feeling in these things——"

Maxie was aggrieved, because he could not permit himself to believe that he did not deserve better of fate than to be always put in the stumer team. In actual fact, he was an awkward rider, and by no means as bold as he would have you believe. Like many another, and possibly better men than himself, he lied about his form—and no one believed his lies.

At last he went to bed. There was no sign of Edith or Teddy. Hilda had vanished, and Lawrence Grove gone back to Adrigole, so Kenny watched his guest take his way up the staircase, and then went back to turn out the lights.

## CHAPTER VIII

**E**VEN then he did not go to bed. Castle Glenfield was lighted by old-fashioned oil lamps, and there was no easy switching off of lights possible. You went round like some irresistible fate, turning down little screws and usually blowing down the chimney, because the screws which turned the wicks hardly ever were in working order.

In the drawing-room, the ashes in the grate were still glowing under a crest of fluffy white, as delicate as powder; and there was the lingering touch of all the personalities still in the air, as though their thoughts had not been all and entirely withdrawn. Elodie's book lay on her chair, and Kenny took it up to see what she had been reading. He laughed to himself as he replaced it, for it was an elderly treatise on the Apostolic Succession, and yet Elodie had appeared engrossed in it to the complete forgetfulness of all else. Aunt Lucy had dropped a piece of lace knitting, the sort of thing which isn't really either lace or knitting, on the floor beside her chair. Two chairs close together betrayed where Hil and Larry had sat, and here was a low seat with three chairs drawn near it. Unquestionably Edith Ransome had eventually settled to hold her court at that corner of the room. A waft of sweetness came in from a lilac bush outside, and the tenderness of the moonlight induced Kenny to walk out, having extinguished his lamps faithfully, into the space of garden ground which lay beyond the drawing-room windows. He wanted, after the idiotic way in which these desires will come, to see the outside of Elodie's windows, and he wanted to laugh at her about



Apostolic Succession. A sweet, summery scent was in the air. The syringa bushes were in heavy bud, and the grass was growing deep beyond the stone fence. Soon the corn-crakes would be nesting and filling the night with their harsh, persistent note, and from where he stood he could hear the faint sound of running water, a sound which it was always possible to hear, either at Castle Glenfield or Adrigole.

The world, under the strong, searching moonlight, seemed a wonderful place. It surrounded Gleeson with white magic, and all the dismay and doubt, and the little chatter of people, fell away. Why should he, or any one else, sit with a long face like a discontented Job, puzzling himself about life? The odd, travelling changes which sway the tendency of thoughts gave him a new mood. He had chosen to complain that his own past was empty, and that the lives of the others were also void and vain, even when they were contented and happy, and he had said and felt all these things without reckoning on the future. The future might hold a thousand surprises. As things stood, Elodie was to marry Harrington, but they were not yet married. Fate had left a loop-hole in the battlements, and Kenny felt his soul stir with a sudden exaltation. The almost mystical softness of the night air touched his face caressingly, and he knew that he was one with the wide, clean sky and the free waters of the river; and one, in some subtle sense, with the whole vast Universe. His sudden love for Elodie had shown him this like a revelation, and how was such a poor creature as Teddy Harrington to stand between them and the gardens of delight which they two had the right to enter?

The sound of voices speaking broke the stillness, and to Kenny, whose nerves were tightened up to an almost ecstatic point of tension, the reaction that struck in upon him was acute. Teddy was making ardent love, and was also reminding Edith Ransome

of things which she had said and sworn and vowed at some time previous to that collapsed moment.

"You used to love me," he said, as they stood on the edge of the black shadows of the fir trees. "Gleeson has filled your eye. Of course I see that, but I won't let you go."

Kennedy turned to get out of reach of any further revelations, but the two marionettes in the shadow had seen and recognized him, and he heard his name called by Mrs. Ransome.

"Don't go away," she said, "we are so bored with each other that we all but came to blows, and it must be late—isn't it?"

Kenny walked across the strip of gravel.

"I very nearly locked you out," he said, with a slightly constrained laugh. "I thought you had gone upstairs, Mrs. Ransome. You aren't afraid of catching cold?"

Harrington stood, the picture of baffled irritation, of the weak, tempestuous kind; and then without a word he walked into the house.

Mrs. Ransome gave a little laugh, half-contemptuous and half-amused.

"I love basking in the moonlight," she said. "It seems like another world, doesn't it, Kennedy? Look at the way that the limes hold all that glamour, and the flowers smell twice as sweet. The sun is so brazen and so indiscriminating."

She lifted her head and, in the clear light, she looked very arresting and very proud. The pity of it was that she was not really a proud woman at all, and her eyes were on Gleeson's face. The moonlight treated him well also, and all his natural distinction was intensified.

"When you are laid up to-morrow with a cold in your head you won't feel so kindly disposed towards the moon," he said abruptly.

"Did you hear—why, you must have heard

Teddy?" She laughed again, her loud, rather mirthless laugh, and she put a slim hand on his sleeve. "He is very cross just at present. Of course he will recover. Just now he is ruffled. Does anything ever ruffle your own imperturbable calm?"

"I don't know."

He looked at her defiantly and, as they stood in the daylight clearness of the night, one of the big dogs in the stables began to bay at a distant noise. The sound startled Mrs. Ransome and she came closer to Kennedy.

"Is that unlucky?" she said. "I hate that sound, it sends cold shivers down my spine——"

"Edith," said a voice from the drawing-room window, and Major Ransome came out quickly. He, like Harrington, was obviously suffering from suppressed temper, and, though she ignored it, he had got past the point where he could altogether control himself.

"Do you usually take walks at this hour with your guests?" he asked Kennedy rudely. "I don't know what you are all thinking of."

"Oh, Maxie," Mrs. Ransome spoke with bored tolerance, "we haven't been walking. How could I walk anywhere in these shoes? Mr. Gleeson and I have been admiring the limes and worshipping the moon, and I was just coming in when that dog began—do you hear him? You know how the sound irritates my nerves."

Ransome took her by the arm, and made no reply.

"Good-night," she said, over her shoulder, and Kennedy heard her husband speaking with a deep intonation of wrath as they passed out of earshot.

It was nothing to him in any real sense, but, between them all, they had ruined his early mood. How in the world did they get over the fact that there were so many of these futile creatures perpetually cropping up? Edith Ransome with her insatiable love of play-

ing with fire, and such fire. Silly little squibs and crackers. She was no Cleopatra, as she swept by with her train of equally foolish and futile captives. Kennedy knew that she wanted to add him to the list. Even though he went through life without any kind of vanity in this respect he could not shut his eyes to the fact that she was arming herself for his defeat. That he had not the smallest wish to oust Harrington from his place, or to disturb the peace of mind of Maxie Ransome, had nothing at all to say to it. While Edith was at large she would inevitably and invariably cause disturbance. He shrugged his shoulders. It all came of not doing what he believed he should have done, and there was a touch of retributive justice in the fact that he was not to escape personal annoyance. He had invited these people—made a hole for the mosquito to get inside the protective curtain—and he did not intend to allow it to trouble him further.

Closing the windows of the drawing-room, he gave the house back to the soft security of closed shutters and darkness, and then he went up the staircase, past the lady with the unlit lamp, and found his way to his own room.

A storm in a tea-cup is a foolish thing, but if you happen to be in the tea-cup during the storm it can be annoying.

The day before the wedding passed in a series of dashes and rushes to recover lost time, and to get things into order. Teddy had made up his mind to take a strong line, and he attached himself to Elodie. All his former indifference had vanished, and he followed her about from room to room and took her away after lunch. He seemed to have fallen in love with her again, and he avoided Edith Ransome, who was forced to content herself with the attentions of Uncle Richard Joicey.

Maxie made a kind of apology to Kennedy, and said

that he must have looked a fool, but then no one likes being kept up half the night while two people "stand about asking for pneumonia." There was no use for Kennedy to explain to him that he had merely been the postscript to Mrs. Ransome's nocturnal adventures, so he made no attempt to do so. Everything was going wrong, and he had a temper of his own. Eventually he sought the shelter of Aunt Lucy's room and sat with her for an hour or two. He would soon be going away, and she valued every minute that he could spare.

"I believe I've been sitting under a beam ever since I got back to Castle Glenfield," he said, as he looked at the worn patches in the Brussels carpet. "No one has any luck if they sit under a beam."

Miss Gleeson regarded her nephew with interest and speculation.

"So *that's* what is wrong with you, Kenny. Well, it's a complaint that we must most of us suffer from, some day."

Kennedy did not quibble. If Aunt Lucy had read his parable, it was, he suspected, obvious enough.

"But you aren't going to let Frederick Harrington 'get the rails on you,' as your grandfather used to say. Surely, Kenny, you have more spirit in you than that?"

"He's engaged to her," Kennedy said slowly.

"Well, if he is, wasn't your mother engaged to that long-legged fool, Knockboyne—but she married Malcolm Gleeson; and wasn't Dick engaged to one and another all over the County Cork? Engagements—I don't regard them so much as worth mentioning," said Aunt Lucy, with fine scorn. "I myself was engaged—and more than once, Kenny, though you mightn't think it to look at me now. If she was married it would be another pair of shoes altogether, as the cobbler said to the blacksmith. Even then," Miss Gleeson shook a finger at him, "I'd not put it past you to carry her off to the Colonies."

She saw that the heart's desire of her Beloved was going amiss, and she was quite ready to advise strong measures. Had she lived in the days when such things were possible Aunt Lucy would not have been above hiring an assassin to remove Teddy Harrington bodily from the road which he obstructed.

"Elodie can't like the creature," she went on vigorously, "a poor reach-me-down, with a waist like a woman, and a pair of padded shoulders. Dancing after that painted Jezebel downstairs, too, if I'm not mistaken. If you let him take her he will make her wretched, and then what will be the use of saying, 'But she was engaged, Aunt Lucy,' and look at me as if I was wearing the devil's horns instead of my cap?"

"I know all that," Kennedy said, staring at the drowsy fire, that blinked in the strong summer sunlight, streaming through the windows of the room.

"Well, if you know it, are you going to do nothing?" she retorted. It seemed to her as though the wish of her heart was just within reach. She, too, discerned a precious quality in Elodie which she approved, and Elodie could induce this dear, wild bird to remain at home. It was maddening to think that such a possibility could be shattered by so weak and foolish a person as Harrington.

Gleeson got up and stood staring at a photograph of his father, which depicted him with bushy whiskers and strange-looking boots. It struck him that women as a class should be able to get what they wanted, owing to the fact that, if he were to judge them by Aunt Lucy, they had no established principles where the personal element was involved. To him it seemed practically impossible to intervene deliberately between Harrington and Elodie, and yet he realized the force of the argument that there was something stupid in permitting everything he really valued in life to go, out of regard for a convention.

Then and there, while he appeared to be studying

the features of Malcolm Gleeson, he made up his own mind. He intended to fight for his claim, and he intended to give Teddy due warning that such was his purpose.

"Well?" asked Aunt Lucy sharply; "when you have done admiring your father, will you let me know what you are thinking of, Kenny?"

"It might come right," Kennedy said, and he smiled. "But one should fight fair, even so."

When he had gone Aunt Lucy shook her head. She was by no means satisfied. She considered that young Lochinvar was the ideal suitor, and she wanted Kennedy to take a dashing and imperious line of action. The world was changing, so she believed, and was not at all what it had once been, when she was young. Everything was going out of date which belonged to the romantic period of duels and great wagers, and even the sportsmen of the new generation were lacking in the rashness and valiancy of those she remembered so well, and admired so steadfastly. It seemed to her that lack of enthusiasm was weakening the race. The old Sheridan Club where men had gambled in estates over the fall of the dice was closed, and even the excitement of the bad times, when a police escort had lent a touch of drama to a walk as far as the village, was over. The children of the new era were not like the ghosts she recalled, and Kenny had almost forgotten that he was Irish. She felt saddened and depressed, and then Hilda ran into the room and stood there, clad in her white wedding-dress.

"I told you not to try it on when it came back," said Aunt Lucy. "I don't know what you are all coming to, Hilda. But, all the same, I will say that it suits you well."

Hilda kissed her aunt and deposited a load of presents on the floor.

"Three dozen more sets of teaspoons," she said, "and the Killineys have sent a copy of Shakespeare."

Aunt Lucy sniffed superciliously.

"I'd not doubt them," she remarked.

"Mr. Watts and his wife have sent us a huge prayer-book, Aunt Lucy, and dear Dr. Barry has given us a terrier. This afternoon our tenants are making a presentation, and the Adrigole tenants have given Larry a hunting horn. Oh, I shall be glad when it's all over."

"And I hope you'll *keep* glad," said Miss Gleeson pointedly.

Hilda fluttered off in a shimmer of white satin, and once more Aunt Lucy was left to her own reflections. She picked up the heavily-bound copy of Shakespeare's works and looked at it contemptuously.

"A *book!*" she said. "Well, well, well."

Kennedy had no very great difficulty in finding his opportunity for a straight talk with Teddy Harrington. The house was topsy-turvy, and people wandered about like sheep without a shepherd, and it was in the smoking-room that Gleeson eventually discovered his friend in a gloomy mood enough.

Elodie had been giving trouble. She had not at all responded to Teddy's sudden desire to assert himself, and she had threatened that she would not go on with their engagement. In fact, things had looked so serious that Teddy was forced to threaten in return. He said he would go to the devil, or even shoot himself, and that she would then know all the anguish of regret. In the end, he had forced her to compromise, and Elodie had agreed to leave things as they were.

"I am not sure of myself," she said, her eyes troubled and her face strained and pale.

"It's this infernal place," Harrington replied irritably. He was thinking of Edith and her altered mood. "When you get away from here you will feel differently. Must we wait a whole year, Elodie?"

"I don't believe I shall ever marry you," she spoke in a dull voice. "But if you like to go on as we



are——” and with that concession he had to appear content.

He was standing in the window, and as Kennedy came in he turned quickly. Kennedy was the real reason for all his troubles, and he disliked him cordially.

“A wedding seems to be nearly as beastly as a funeral in a house,” he said with a touch of temper, and Gleeson sat down on the low seat by the window.

“I want to say something which I think should be said.” Kennedy lighted a cigarette and looked at Harrington. “You know that I’m a blunt kind of person, Teddy.”

“Say what you like,” Harrington remarked in a bored voice.

“If you and Elodie are not married in six months I intend to try my own luck with her.”

“By God, you do, do you?” Teddy laughed unpleasantly. “That is fairly cool.”

“I don’t think so.” Gleeson talked without heat or anger, and he knocked the ash of his cigarette into a little silver tray. “She has no idea of what I feel, and I am going away. You told me only the night before last that you were not altogether a devout lover, and, since then, I have felt that there was no very strong reason why I should stand out.”

“I told you that I intend to marry her.” Teddy’s hands shook a little, and he blinked his eyelids.

“If at the end of six months she still cares about you, I shall get a point-blank refusal; and at that time I shall come back and ask her.”

Harrington flushed to his fair hair.

“You’ll dam well keep out,” he said.

“No, I shan’t keep out. I’ve told you quite plainly what line I shall follow. Until then I say nothing. You hold the cards, Teddy, and there’s no question of my taking any kind of mean advantage. So long as she is not your wife she has it in her power either to

accept or refuse me, but I shan't rush in. Where she is concerned," he went on, his voice touched with a sudden feeling, "for either of us to expect her to care is flat audacity. You have a start of me, and you keep that start for six months longer, but then, by God——" Gleeson got up and his eyes grew dangerous——"I'll fight you."

He said no more, and he walked out of the room, for he believed in brevity. For a moment Harrington stood undecided what to do, and then he gave his thin laugh. He had been content to drift for another year; but his "dear friend Gleeson," as he called him, had provided him with ample and sufficient reason to pull off the event within half that time.

Next day Hil and Larry were made man and wife, in the little church where they both had sat during countless Sundays as though for a Harvest Thanksgiving, and even melons and pumpkins had been piled round the chancel steps. Mr. Watts, perspiring freely, and more self-conscious even than the bridegroom, conducted the pair from the chancel to the altar at the wrong moment, and had to lead them back again. The church was crowded to overflowing and Elodie was the one bridesmaid; Kenny acted as best man, and Uncle Richard Joicey gave Hilda away with great dignity and address. Outside, there was a smiling, sunny day, with dappled cloud shadows over the wonderful country, and all the road which ran like a white ribbon from Castle Glenfield to the village was crowded with motors and cars.

Every one had been invited, and every one who was invited came. There were side-cars, covered cars of ancient pattern, traps, motors, and bicycles, even one or two wagonettes. Lord and Lady Killiney came in a carriage and pair, and gave the Frank Northcotes a lift back to the house. This was a precious memory, to be kept among the reminiscences. Kenny took

Elodie away in the little two-seater, and Teddy, who was still under obligations to the Ransomes, looked after Edith, who again was in the mood to angle for his soul.

Yet, with all its surface happiness there was the inevitable touch of sadness in it, that cannot be entirely kept out of even the gayest good-bye to a former state of things.

"Everything will be just the same when we come back," Hil said, with a sudden storm of tears in her eyes, as she hugged Kennedy's arm, just before she left the house, and she tried to believe that it would.

But it was not going to be the same, though Kennedy did not say so; he only gripped her arm and wished her good luck. They went off in a storm of cheers and rice; a rain of rice that lay in unexpected corners and was white over the gravel for days after; and the cheers and view-halloos of the guests blended into the shrill cheers of the school children assembled at the gate lodge. Surely it is something to once have been quite as happy and careless as all that?

The same afternoon all the guests went away, and the next morning Kennedy left for Scotland, where he was to join a friend on a salmon river, and Castle Glenfield and Adrigole waited for the return of happiness. He parted from Elodie without another word to her alone, and Teddy and the Ransomes left shortly after in the big, spacious car, going back to Cork.

Everything was over, and the curtain had fallen, and, as Elodie sat in a railway carriage, steaming through the wide brown Bog of Allen, she took a little ring made out of grass and slipped it on to her finger, and though she smiled at it, her smile was a wavering one.

Were they all really only playing at life, or was there some dim presentiment of hurrying events coming towards them through the silence ahead?

The date of the wedding was June 26, 1914.

## **PART II**

" . . . The war has not changed them much. One can recognize them all.

"Are you sure you can recognize them? You have just been looking at them, are you sure that you have seen them? . . . All these men are no longer those you lately knew. . . . They are now something more than themselves; those we loved were merely happy shadows."

GEORGES DUHAMEL.

## CHAPTER IX

**T**HE little town of Belle Court lay in a loop-like bend of the river Oise. It was a friendly little place, and a big parish church stood on the rise of ground just behind the small town itself, vaulted with dark-blue stone and red brick, after the Flemish fashion, and from the tower, the slow, sweet chime of a carillon rang out the passing of pleasant hours. There was also a Dominican Convent with a carved front, which faced a square where most of the cafés were situated, and there was a bandstand in the *Place* for amusement and relaxation. Here, there, and everywhere there were gay little gardens, and the railway which passed through Belle Court ran on away through the green fen-lands of West Flanders.

Once it had been a secure and happy place, and, just about the time when Hilda and Lawrence Grove had been married, the people of Belle Court were probably marrying and giving in marriage, with the same careless trust in the future. The fortunes of the town altered very quickly, and many of the houses were closed in the first days of August, the legend "*Fermée pour cause de la mobilisation*" written in straggling white chalk letters on the closed shutters of the restaurants and shops. Large yellow posters, calling up reservists to arms in the name of the Republic, clothed the walls and hoardings, and so the first signs of change came; and there were widows and orphans in Belle Court, who, a few weeks before, had not dreamed of such a fate.

Then came even more evil times, and the inhabitants were forced to leave, except for a few brave spirits who could not or would not realize the peril

that was about to descend upon them; and for a while they appeared to be justified of their courage, for nothing happened.

One cool, blue morning at the beginning of September the outlines of Belle Court stood up against the dawn. Some of the roofs had been broken by shell fire, and the church tower had suffered considerably, but though the place was sadly deserted the general effect had not suffered the ugly change of war. Some of the creepers were turning a soft rose crimson, and the limes in the square were transformed by the gentle decadence of the season into fountains of pale lemon yellow. A shell had crashed the bandstand into an unrecognizable mass of shattered masonry and timber, and there were gaping holes in the streets. The Route Nationale, with its border of poplars cut across a tract of wide fields of beetroot, and a little wood, which still held its summer green, clothed a rise on the outskirts of Belle Court to the west. On the nearest eastern point of the town there was a large sugar refinery, and close to it a yellow plastered château, where a thin curl of smoke from the chimneys still told of life carried on within its walls. There was nothing which cried aloud to the skies that war was on the land, and only the extraordinary quiet of the place marked the fact that the earthquake shock had been already felt. The road was deserted, and no traffic either came or went along its dignified expanse, though the British troops were not far away. You would think that the place was under some spell, and the wild gardens, left uncared for during the previous weeks, already gave a romantic touch to the picture, recalling the legend of the Briar Rose. But it was no advent of any prince which the little town awaited, and the kiss which was to dispel the stillness was a kiss of fire. All the rolling downs of the undulating country beyond were tinged with the purple colour of the beetroot harvest, and a grey gauzy veil of mist

still hung like departing dreams over the whole expanse, where field and valley melted into the distance. The sunlight touched the pointed roofs of the town and touched the woods with gilded magic. It lingered on the sugar refinery and turned the windows of the yellow plastered château into squares of shining gold. There were barricades at the ends of the streets, and they had been there for some time. The women and children who remained in Belle Court had grown used to the touch of coming terror which these erections had once given them, and they hardly troubled about them now; those *esprits forts* who had chosen to remain were indifferent to the writing on the wall. Yet, that early autumn morning, fear was to come upon them all, and the sound of its coming was not far off.

Six miles away, and descending from the north, the British troops were pressing forward to straighten the line, and their point was Belle Court, and the way appeared clear enough. . . . By mid-day, when the sun had scorched up every last web-like film of moisture from the fields, Belle Court had suffered the agonies of violation. From the world beyond the wood, and without any preliminary bombardment, a line of German infantry had advanced from the cover, and, followed by supports, crossed the beetroot fields, leaping and running towards the town. A little later, so that you were outside Belle Court, you might still have looked at it carefully through your glasses and not have known what had passed within. The blue curl of smoke from the château mounted into the clear air, and the sugar refinery slept behind its closed windows. There was nothing to tell that the rope which had long been around the necks of the inhabitants had suddenly been pulled tight, and that inside every house along the streets massed German troops were lying on the floors, and hidden under the archways. A false peace still showed its smooth face to



the incoming troops, and there was no one in Belle Court to give the alarm.

At the outbreak of war Kennedy Gleeson was still in Scotland. He was fishing with his friend David Filson, who was hurriedly recalled to his command at Aldershot. David was a Brigadier-General, and he felt that the great moment of his life had come. Kenny, on the other hand, realized that he had missed his own great moment, because he had not wanted to be a peace soldier, and now war had come and he was no sort of soldier at all. He was determined to pull the situation out of the fire, and to get to France somehow or other, but the question was, how?

For weeks he assailed the War Office, all to no avail. He saw his own friends go, and he said good-bye to Teddy Harrington, who had immediately secured a staff job, with a sense of envy that made life intolerable; but he pinned his faith upon David Filson.

"For God's sake, David, get me out as your groom, if there isn't anything else I can do," he said; and he joined an Officers' Training Corps, working feverishly to learn the routine.

"I'll get you out," Filson said hopefully; "but I expect the war will be over in a few weeks."

Kenny, in his private's uniform, cursed his own stupidity, and he, too, believed that he was to be one of those unfortunate creatures who had "never seen a shot fired in anger," of which the world appeared to be so full. They were all the same; and they were all haunted by the fear that the conclusion would leave them only ready for the occupation of German territory.

And then the change came, and with it the wider chance. Things went hopelessly bad, and David who had been promoted to a higher command, wrote to say that he had applied for Kennedy, and that in a few days he could count upon being under orders

for France. There was no time to go back to Adri-gole to see Hilda, and there was no time to say good-bye to Aunt Lucy. They telegraphed those wonderful cheerful telegrams, which were sent with tears and received with the strange, tense silence of a sudden realization that anything might so easily happen. But illusion lived along in 1914.

Elodie was in London, staying with her people at a quiet hotel in Knightsbridge, and there Kennedy found her. They sat in a square panelled hall, where every one seemed to be saying good-bye, and the very soul of parting hung intangibly in the air.

As he took his place beside her, he thought her altered a little already, and he wondered if she was anxious about Teddy. It wasn't the time for him to talk of himself, and, in any case, Harrington was now in France, and had fought through the fierce first weeks when the world was awakening to the truth. Teddy had been taking his chances all that time, and, so far as report could be trusted, had done well. Elodie's eyes were over-bright, and her wonderful crimped red hair looked like a flame over her pale face. She looked at Gleeson and remained very silent. Not for one moment now could she lie to herself, or keep up a polite fiction. She loved him with a desperate sense of sincerity and truth, but Teddy stood definitely between her and any right to show him her hidden heart.

Kennedy was full of an accentuated vitality, and he laughed as he held her hands for a moment.

"I'm actually off," he said. "Can you believe it for me, Elodie? I can't. These last weeks have been damnable."

David Filson was a good fellow, he had expedited the time by months, but Elodie did not feel grateful to David Filson. She felt that Kenny had forgotten everything except the war, and that it hardly mattered to him now whether she cared or did not care. And

he was going away. They might never meet again in this world, but he did not think of that. She called to her own courage to assist her, and she talked as if it was nothing at all, and over and over again she said, "When you come back." There was a little meagre comfort in the repetition of those words.

Kennedy dined with her and Lord and Lady Almworth. Lady Almworth was amiable and kind, and gave him a bottle of Horlick's malted milk tabloids, and Lord Almworth told him not to wear field-glasses or a watch with a luminous dial. It was as though those two unlucky possessions were losing the war for England. They were all aware that things were going badly, and that the comforting theory that the Germans were being "led on" was not convincing any longer. So they did not talk very much about it; they spoke of the future with a touch of vagueness, and they all agreed that the war should be over by Christmas.

"My nephew, Walter Stratton, has been taken prisoner," Lady Almworth said, in a tone of forced cheerfulness. "I hope he is getting on well. News comes rather slowly—of course that is only to be expected. *I think they treat the prisoners well, don't you think so, Mr. Gleeson?*"

Kenny agreed that, unless you fell into the hands of savages, you were likely to get quite a good time as a prisoner of war. Lord Almworth, a tall thin man with the face of a clever lawyer, spoke about Louvain and Termonde. He appeared to hold other views than his wife with regard to German hospitality.

"I am *sure* it is all exaggerated," Lady Almworth spoke with a kind of passionate desire to uphold her own views. "I can't believe it. I know so many Germans. You remember," she turned to her husband, "how much we always liked the Von Engelbachs, and when we stayed with them at Stolzenfels we had a really lovely time."

She explained hastily that she was not pro-German, but that, for the sake of decency and humanity, she could not believe all that she had been told.

Kennedy looked at her, and he realized that she was trying to cover behind her defences. A blood-stained world was a hateful place to her, and she wanted to persuade herself that the nightmare was not so bad as people said.

"Suppose they came to England," began Lord Almworth, and she interrupted him with an imploring gesture.

"Don't," she said, and her voice betrayed her feelings.

"She believes every word of it," Kennedy said to himself, and he pitied her suddenly, and prophesied smooth things.

After dinner was over he was allowed by her parents to take Elodie to the tail end of a musical comedy, which was highly popular, and was a strong blend of patriotism and sentiment. A young man of military age with a fine tenor voice besought every one else to go to the war, to fight for a variety of reasons; and, judging by the audience, which was chiefly composed of young women and men already in khaki, most people agreed with him. It was all a jumble of noise, light, and enthusiasm, and Elodie caught some of the fever. Every one was swayed by a tempest of haste. If you didn't do everything at once you might never do it at all.

Kennedy met George Palliser in the crowded *foyer*, as he took Elodie out when the performance was over. He was bringing her to the Savoy for supper; this also by special permission. Lady Almworth had not liked to refuse. "One never knows in a war," she had said ("though of course nothing will happen to Mr. Gleeson"). And George had said that he had just kissed a girl whom he had never set eyes on before.

"Not the sort of girl you might think," he re-

marked, as he confided the incident in a low whisper, "but, somehow, it seemed the natural thing to do." He was surprised and interested in this evidence of war psychology.

At the Savoy the same feeling governed the suppers. George Palliser had called it "the pink wave," and though he had not the most remote notion what he meant, the term really had a descriptive value. Blood-red waves might and would follow, but at that moment it was the pink wave. Elodie had got a little touch of it into her pale cheeks, and Kennedy found it desperately difficult to quell his own ever-rising desire to throw discretion to the winds and put honour somewhere where it could be forgotten for a moment, and let his own will have full play. Through their speech or their silence alike, the knowledge that their one longing was just the primitive one that commands lovers in every corner of the earth to cling close, was loudly, dominantly obvious. But even if Kennedy could not control his eyes, he was at least capable of refraining from overt action.

They were in a London restaurant, with the band playing the maddening music that would make prophets, saints, apostles, and martyrs realize that they were young, and that life was precious, and love very, very sweet. But there was also the unseen guest at the table with them.

Once again Teddy had got a start, and he had been in the tumult and peril of war. He had written of the tearing sounds of the shells and the blind confusion of the hard-fought struggle going on all the time out there in France; and he had said little or nothing of the horrors of it all, because Teddy knew that one did not write home of those things. At that very moment he might be lying in one of the cornfields near Craonne, and never come back to try on another suit of new clothes again, no, nor wear his wonderful sleeve-links and smile his weak, at-

tractive smile, which made most women call him "a dear."

Even if it was his last evening with Elodie, Kennedy knew that he must only take just so much as the gods saw fit for him to have. So he very effectually stood between them and the intimacy of touch; but, unless he had shut his eyes or deliberately sat with his back to her, Kenny could not keep the truth from his glance.

As for Elodie, she knew very well that there was nothing else for them to do, and she gripped her hands together until the big half-hoop of diamonds bruised her fingers, and the lightening and darkening of her mood came and went. Sometimes she was overwhelmed with dread for him, and sometimes she felt that he *must* come safely back. Perhaps if they were very good now, if neither of them let out their mutual secret into spoken words, the gods would be kind.

She was beset by the strangeness of it all, and she knew that a power within herself would keep her strong. As they sat together until the lights began to go out and the other groups were dispersing, she knew that this kind of false courage was getting always stronger.

And then the string band began to play the "Marseillaise." The sound of the music rose and rose like a surging flood, and it swept through the room with the force of conquering armies. Everybody sprang to their feet, as if to acclaim a spirit which pushed death aside and pointed to an ideal so great and so tremendous that it reduced the price required to less than nothing. What was life after all? A fleeting vapour, a little shadow on the hills? The grandeur and the majesty of the conception stormed to the very soul, and, across the waves of sound, Kennedy looked her in the eyes. No "pink wave" this time, but the clear blue water of things eternal and everlasting. Elodie

felt before her with a trembling hand, and she knew that to think of herself or her own pain at such a moment would be so unworthy that she could not bear the shame of it. All the warriors of Valhalla must be gathered there unseen, listening with the others who were soon going to follow in their footsteps, and, as she returned his look, her own eyes were filled with triumph; not the triumph of victory, but that much better kind which lives equally in defeat and anguish—and swings on carelessly through death. It had been a wonderful evening for both of them, and he left her in the hall of the hotel in Knightsbridge.

“Good-luck,” she said as she smiled, and there was nothing strained or forced about her smile.

“I’ll come back,” he replied, with a nod. “Don’t you worry, Elodie, all the bad half-pennies will turn up again.”

And somewhere along the path of Kenny’s destiny there was a picturesque little archway, covered with wistaria in purple flower, and starry passion-flowers, that waited until he should come down the road; because Aunt Lucy had been perfectly right when she said that the shadow of destiny had fallen long before, and into that shadow he was certainly going to be drawn. All the mystery which is so close to us sometimes, and so distant at others, was near enough at that moment to Kennedy Gleeson to have made its advance along the soundless track felt, through some unknown sense; but he was not troubling his head about the immediate future.

He already knew the look of danger, and he knew what a big place the world seems when you are sleeping out of doors under a night sky. He would probably have said, had Elodie asked him, that he knew pretty well everything that he would have to face.

“Have you heard from Hil?” was one of the

questions she had put to him, and that at least he could answer faithfully.

"She writes that Larry is not doing anything, because he thinks it will only mean going up for training just as the season begins, and that he would lose the hunting and have no war for recompense," he said; and he added, "Let us all go and hunt over there in January."

And under the archway, in the little town on the Aisne, the *esprits forts* were still coming and going, bolstered up in their own faith that the Saints or the English would never permit the German troops to invade their streets. It was not even a lofty and beautiful archway, though the wistaria made it look attractive, but then we may not choose the scenery of the surroundings in which things happen to us, any more than the event itself, or the striking of the hour in which the event is to take place. Neither he nor Elodie had ever heard of its existence, but the cords of a man's fate are woven on strange looms, and no one knows the end. If Kennedy had seen the path, so short a distance ahead, he might have faltered, even though his courage was an assured quality. He saw nothing but Elodie's eyes, and the look in them was like wine. Even though he had to leave her with everything still unspoken, and without once having made her mouth his with the strong, hard kiss of parting, he was utterly content.



## CHAPTER X

ONE early September morning Kennedy Gleeson rode along the Route Nationale in a hurry.

He had only been a week in France, and the strangeness of everything gave a haunting fascination to it all. He had eaten his breakfast in a small *estaminet* in a long straggling village street, where the *Patron* had bewailed himself loudly. He said that he felt the Germans were coming near. No, he had no reason for saying so, but he knew it by instinct, and already his wife and children were packed into a farm cart and travelling as quickly as they could towards La Chaussée.

Kennedy formed one of a scratch commando gathered in haste from the remnants of a number of broken units. The troops with them, though lamentably small in numbers, belonged to the great first army—the Expeditionary Force, and the officers had all sat round a table eating omelettes, fried eggs, and an elderly chicken, an hour or two after sunrise. The untidy interior of the house proclaimed the fact that madame had already gone, and the innkeeper remained in a thoroughly reluctant mood. Seated about on cases and bundles of clothing packed ready for departure, each one of the group knew that the hour when they were to plunge into the dramatic issues of war was very close; and the knowledge took them all differently.

Launcelot Grey, the Commanding Officer lately promoted, was very quiet. The weight of responsibility lay heavily on his shoulders, and Fawkes, his adjutant, showed signs of restlessness. None of them was entirely normal, and yet it was still hard to believe

that the expedition was not a wild picnic. Little Robert Cassilis, whose spirits were always exuberant, talked more than usual. He always referred to the war as "manœuvres," and he could hardly swallow anything except his coffee. Grey had decided to advance to Belle Court and take up a strong position in the small town before mid-day, and later, at twilight or after nightfall, the German forces were certain to attack. He studied a map as he ate slowly and deliberately, for there was plenty of time to cover the distance, take up positions, and have everything ready. Holt, the machine-gun officer, a young man with a sharp nose and a loud voice, had a great deal to say. He was looking for promotion and wanted to get a decoration, a fact of which the others were well aware. Robert Cassilis, who could not be repressed, said that Holt would shoot one of them himself, so as to save his victim under the eye of a General, and for that reason he wanted to have his own platoon well away from the near neighbourhood of any one so ambitious. Kenny was not thinking of himself at all as he ate his food. Inwardly he was perfectly calm, and his eyes were amused as he looked at the circle of faces. There was something in the untidy, hapless *estaminet* suited to the strain and uncertainty of events. Two calves had wandered snuffling to the open door, and a hen was making absurd noises in the yard outside. It was all such a jumble of realities and possibilities. The queer sense of rising above all relation to *things* was sufficiently marked, and it was as though some intangible meeting-place between the present and the future had already been arrived at. Kennedy enjoyed it, with unmistakable zest, as he sat looking immensely vital, his daring blue eyes full of strong feeling towards the adventure just ahead. He knew very well that it was going to be, practically, a forlorn hope. There were no reserves to come up, no reinforcements if things went amiss; not a hope in life to fall back

upon, but he liked things best that way. He was not obsessed by the idea of being on manœuvres, because he had never been a soldier, but he was thinking of the cart filled with the *Patron's* children and driven by his wife, driving along the great road with fear behind them.

"And so you can smell Germans?" he said pleasantly, turning to the man, who was preparing more coffee. "By Gad, that seems to be an instinct worth cultivating. What do they smell like?"

The *Patron* described his own ideas on the subject in highly coloured terms.

"There are none within ten miles of Belle Court," said Colonel Grey, looking up from his map.

"All the more credit to our friend's nose," said Kennedy; and then he changed his place and pushed Holt away from the map.

"There may be something in it," he said, lowering his voice a little, and looking at Grey with intention.

"I have full information, Gleeson. We can march direct into Belle Court. After that there will be a bit of a struggle, I expect; but there isn't anything to worry about before then."

Kennedy tapped his fingers on the glazed paper before him. "I'm disposed to have more faith in the *Patron's* powers of smell than you," he said slowly. "It's quite true that a stag can wind an enemy miles away, and if the German troops are half as aromatic as the *Patron* believes he may have grounds for packing off his wife and children."

Grey, a man with cold, rather weak-looking eyes, looked quickly at Kennedy. He regarded his manner as little less than insubordinate, and he was totally unaccustomed to having his plans questioned. Still, when he met Kennedy's look, he only made a slight movement with his shoulders. Gleeson wasn't a soldier, and was evidently in ignorance of the rules of orderly-room discipline.

"You don't believe in instinct," Kenny said, smiling quickly, "but, all the same, it's worth considering. This morning, for a reason which he can't really explain, the innkeeper has felt it imperative to fling everything that he really values to the winds. He isn't acting out of funk. If he had really got the wind up badly he wouldn't be here to-day."

Grey was considerably ruffled, but he laughed to hide the fact.

"You must have been training with the Boy Scouts," he said pointedly; "I don't believe in these wild theories."

He got up and walked with Kennedy to the door of the house, and, taking out his field-glasses, he looked over the peaceful country. Beyond the heavy beetroot crop the outline of Belle Court was calm and reassuring. The valley opened out, cut by the line of woods, and away to right and left the rolling fields of roots and stubble swept in fine contours. Nothing that either Grey or Gleeson could see gave the smallest hint of war, and the roadside inn behind them, with its row of iron tables and chairs outside, looked as it had always looked. Behind it there was a little garden with plumes of rambler roses still in late flower, and the patch of grass in the centre was intersected with small beds, where a few drenched blossoms gave out their last passionate scent and fragrance. There was the usual sanded strip, levelled neatly for playing bowls or skittles, and the whole effect gave a silent denial to the foreboding which still possessed Kenny Gleeson.

As Colonel Grey replaced his glasses, with the air of a man who is too generous to rub in the fact that he has scored over his adversary, a sentry came down the road and saluted.

"Have you seen anything?" Grey asked briefly, and the man replied in a voice of complete conviction that there was nothing to see. He was perfectly cer-

tain that there had been no movement anywhere since an hour after sunrise, when they had come into the little hamlet.

Grey turned and went into the house, and Kenny stood looking at the pattern of the oil-cloth which covered the floor just inside the entrance. Nothing had really satisfied him, and the sense of being silently opposed made his own determination all the more sure. In the commencement he had caught, as it were, at some intangible feeling, conveyed to him by the *Patron*, and now that he had adopted it and made it his own, he was ready to fight for his conviction.

Suppose that there were German troops in that quiet village that looked so safe and easy to march into, and then, suppose further, that Colonel Grey still held to his determination, what earthly chance had the small force against such a possibility?

He lighted a cigarette and walked round the garden. The roses were wonderfully sweet, and he could see the line of the Oise gleaming under the rainbow mists of morning. To be killed in battle was nothing; all of them were prepared for that eventuality, but to be ambushed in a town, and to know that there was nothing on God's earth you could do to protect or help the men. The idea began to suffocate him. Something should be done to prevent even the outside chance of such a disaster. He paced the little garden again, and then he made up his mind. He walked to the doorway and leaned there, one arm against the jamb. The others had evidently been discussing the point, and were taking their line from the Commanding Officer, for there was an abrupt silence when Kennedy appeared, and Fawkes looked half apologetically towards him. Gleeson was the only one of them all who was not a regular nor a reservist, and they had their own feelings on the subject.

"I've been thinking it over," Kennedy said in his easy, attractive way, "and I'm sure, sir, that it is

worth while considering the question of the *Patron's* nose."

"The innkeeper is suffering from scare," Grey replied shortly. He considered Kennedy's way of putting things was frivolous, and he extinguished Robert Cassilis, who had burst into a laugh, with a cold look. "To alter my own dispositions merely because we have come across a man who is in a state of funk is absurd. I should have thought you would be able to see that for yourself."

Kennedy glanced at the drifts of wind clouds in the sky, and the poplars along the road shivered a little as a tiny breeze sighed through their branches. Something certainly was in the air, and it swept over the downs with the floating shadows.

"I did not suggest that you should alter anything," he said, and he crossed the threshold and sat down on a bundle of blankets.

The sunlight fell upon him, bathing him in golden light up to the shoulders, but the shadow from the door caught his head in its sharp knife-like line of contrast. He clasped his hands round his knee, and swung one foot idly.

The room was small with a low ceiling, and a glint of copper pans on the dresser reflected the light with a dull orange glow, and the men standing or seated, gave the effect of a crowd. Robert was playing with the kitten, and Fawkes sitting near the Colonel, did not raise his eyes from the map. They all knew that there was likely to be a tussle presently, and they thought that Kennedy Gleeson was making a mistake. Still, mistake or no mistake, he wasn't the kind of man any one could ignore.

"What I propose," Gleeson said, with every evidence of friendliness in his tone and manner, "is, that you should let me reconnoitre with a few of our fellows. It wouldn't mean much loss of time at worst, and it might possibly be useful. Can I take Cassilis and ten

of the platoon, and then send back word for the main body to advance if—" he laughed in spite of himself—" if my faith is misplaced? How would that be, sir?"

Colonel Grey flushed quickly. He had an idea that Kennedy was laughing at him in some subtle way, and felt irritated. He recalled countless occasions when, for very much less, a junior officer would have been dealt with by the General for such audacity; and as well as this, his nerves were strung up, and above all he wanted to believe that there was no danger immediately before his weary men.

"I shall not permit it," he replied shortly. "I can't possibly spare Lieutenant Cassilis or any of my officers. In an hour's time from now we advance into Belle Court. You have the map of the town, Fawkes?"

"There is no map of the town, sir; we roughed out that it was probably the same in most respects as Bermelles, but it had to be guess-work, I'm afraid."

Gleeson got up from the pile of blankets, and his mouth was set in rather a grim line.

"I must ask you again for permission," he said very deliberately, "to go on by myself."

Colonel Grey had forgotten the real subject of dispute; all he remembered was that Gleeson, a man with no military training whatever, drafted in at the eleventh hour from God knew where, was defying him, but he hesitated, and made an unwilling gesture of assent.

Kennedy fastened on his belt and took up his cap.

"I'm very sorry, sir. You said that the troops were not to move for another hour, during that time I shall be back. By the way, if I'm not back, you can conclude that the town is held by Germans."

He saluted quickly and walked out of the *estaminet*, pleased to think that he had remembered to salute. The small intricacies of army life bothered him because he found them so difficult to remember; but this time

he had not failed in respect to the man whom he regarded as a fool—a brave fool, quite possibly, but none the less provokingly idiotic. Going through the yard at the back he walked into the stables. If he was to do the thing alone, and be back within an hour, he must of necessity add horse-stealing to his other crimes, and he laughed to himself at the thought. If he was put under arrest it did not matter. Nothing mattered so long as he could feel sure that the quiet little village beyond in the wonderful scenery was really as harmless as it appeared. He spoke to the groom and decided at once in favour of Fawkes' charger. She was an Irish mare, still in good condition and light enough to get over the heavy beetroot fields without flagging; and, gathering up the reins in his hand, he mounted and trotted up to a low stone wall which separated the yard from the road. To actually ride past the open door of the *estaminet* in the front would be, he felt, a little too provocative even for such an irregular as himself. Besides, Holt wanted to shoot some one. . . .

The mare cleared the wall in good style, but the sound of trotting hoofs had awakened suspicion in the heart of Fawkes, and he ran to the door, just as Kennedy was cantering along the wide spread of grass on the side of the vast, empty road.

"By Gad, he's gone, sir," the Adjutant's face was a study in mixed emotions, "and he's taken Lean Jane!"

Colonel Grey's face grew rigid, and he made no reply, but the general feeling was not one of disapproval. Robert Cassilis was forced to go outside to disguise his own sensations, and for the moment the tense feeling vanished completely. It was such a gorgeously good story that they all felt some one must remain to tell it later on in the mess. Gleeson had talked like a father to the C.O. and then, on top of his point-blank refusal to permit a reconnoitring party,



forced him to give him leave, and had simply strolled out, pinched the Adjutant's charger and gone off solo. If he returned in the given time, only to report that Belle Court was safe, his future looked extremely black.

"I'd take Lean Jane into the Boche lines, if I were Gleeson," Fawkes said; "he'd be a damned sight more comfortable there than at home"; and they all wondered what would happen when Kenny "re-joined the army."

"He said that if he wasn't back in the hour, something would be up," Holt remarked suddenly. "If he is not, what do you think the Colonel will do?"

"He's in such a hell of a temper at present that I expect we shall carry on," Cassilis said. "By God, I hope he doesn't. I believe Gleeson may have been right."

There was nothing to do but speculate vaguely, and the men were lined up along both sides of the road, sitting along the ditch and talking a little at intervals. Behind the dull routine of the hour there was the perpetually recurring question about Gleeson. Colonel Grey was outwardly ignoring it, and preparations were going on up to the moment when the troops were standing ready to march. The order was to be "Left wheel," and the advance through the beetroot fields. Everything down to the "last gaiter button" was prepared, when Cassilis, who had been scouring the country with his glasses, held up one arm as he watched the road.

"I believe Gleeson is coming back," he called to Fawkes, who had been cursing Kennedy for the loss of his own charger, "at least I'm sure I see Lean Jane."

"Even at the eleventh hour——" the Colonel relaxed a little of his grimness and the battalion remained at the Halt.

And then Lean Jane galloped back, for, like every

Irish horse, she remembered her way to the most transient stable, and she galloped in riderless, with a wound in her neck from which she was bleeding freely.

There was no one in Belle Court to give the alarm, it was true, but Jane managed it effectually.

"Poor old Gleeson," Robert Cassilis said, speaking in the pride of his own twenty-one years, "I wonder what's happened to him?"

An hour later the troops under Colonel Grey were marching along the road, their backs to Belle Court; following in the track of the hooded wagon which held the *Patron's* wife and children, who were flying from the wrath to come. It was known now that Belle Court was held in force by the German troops.

## CHAPTER XI

**W**HEN Gleeson cleared the wall and cantered Lean Jane down the strip of grass alongside the road, he began to work out the problem of his own scheme for getting quietly into the village. A solitary horseman on an empty road was likely to attract undue notice, if there was any one about to watch his doings, so he crossed a narrow ditch and plugged along at a steady pace through the beetroot fields. There were no fences anywhere, and the fall of ground sloped up evenly towards Belle Court. A thin plantation screened the approach to the town on the left, and already the Route Nationale was a good distance behind him.

The sky was blue now to the line of the horizon, and here and there great white clouds hung low over the land. Even though everything appeared asleep, there was a subtle change going on overhead, and the effect of light and shadow was very beautiful. A half-cut cornfield broke the greenish purple of the beetroot harvest, and Jane put up a landrail as she cantered along, the charring and whirring noise made by the bird giving Kennedy a sudden tingling shock. He avoided a wide cabbage-patch in response to his old hunting instinct with regard to growing crops, hardly knowing that he did so, and then he pulled up to take his bearings. You could enter the town either by the main road or by one or two smaller roads which wandered away over the downs, and the effect, now that the sudden tract of beetroot crop was behind him, was that of a patchwork quilt. The church on the hill made the most prominent point among the

crowded roofs, and Kennedy searched with his field-glasses for some sign of occupation.

He was beginning to feel the tension of his self-chosen mission, and his nerves were acutely on the alert. He pulled Jane up to a walk, and the intense silence of the place struck him with the chill of impending disaster. After all, it didn't much matter at which side he made his entrance, and there was no time for deliberation. If he was to reconnoitre and get back to the troops he must be quick about it. He remembered that he should have disguised himself somehow—borrowed a suit from the *Patron*, done something more sensible than go ahead in his own uniform, but all that was too late to alter, and he trotted along a narrow lane which led him direct into the town. It might have been a place of the dead, except for a few animals who wandered in the streets, and Kennedy looked at the shattered houses and still he did not trust the awful peace which brooded everywhere.

In the *Place* he saw the havoc which had reduced the bandstand to chaos, and he looked up at the front of the Hotel *Panier d'Or*. As he turned his eyes to the top row of the windows he saw a hand stealthily pulling a shutter across. It was a moment of considerable mental tension, and Kenny jumped off his mare, with the reins across his arm. Some one was up and doing inside the *Panier d'Or*, and, whoever it was, he must discover whether it was friend or foe.

Fastening Jane to the railings in front of the Hotel, he ran quickly round to the back, under the shelter of the archway covered with flowering creepers, and crossed a small paved courtyard. He had his revolver in his hand, and he crept up carefully under a window, but, as the shutters were closed, it gave him no information. He was not afraid of death, but this kind of hunting was enough to awaken alarms in any heart,

and Gleeson was no exception to any human law. The door leading into the kitchen quarters was open—only a very little open, but still, whoever had closed the shutters had, strangely enough, left it possible for any stray passer-by to enter through the door. Probably there was a passage right through the house, and if it was clear, or if friends were hidden within, he could go right through, unfasten Jane's bridle, and gallop back in time to say all was well. If, on the other hand, he found the place held, and, at worst, he only believed it to be lightly held by an advance party, he would have to fight. Kenny believed in doing this at a rush, and he knew that he could not afford to wait. Still working as quietly as he could, he traversed the little distance separating him from the entrance, and then he came quickly to the door and flung it open.

There was no resistance, but the interior of the place was pitch dark, and, without waiting to think further, he ran into the passage. Somewhere away in the house he heard a woman scream, and, as though her cry, which was ghastly in its wild terror, gave a signal to a hundred heavy shadows, Kenny found himself met by an overwhelming rush. No more brooding silence now.

A window had been opened; the door at the further end of the passage was flung wide, and against the strong, sudden light, Kennedy saw the heavy outlines of a crowd of men, their spiked helmets proclaiming them, and for a few moments he tasted the rage of a single-handed battle against overpowering odds. His one thought was to get to Jane and let her free, and with that idea in his mind he plunged forward, as two of his aggressors fell to the rapid flash of his revolver. He knew that he was wounded, and he was certain that he was going to be killed, but his fierce determination held, and in those moments he thought of nothing else. Somehow, ducking and

fighting with bent head in the narrow passage, he got close to the outer door. They were shouting to him to surrender, and his revolver was empty; there was pain in it all, too, a deadly gripping pain along his neck and shoulder, and the time must be ebbing away, like the flow of his own warm blood. But one thing he must do—one thing he must do—he hardly knew what it was as he staggered out into the sunny *Place* where everything looked just the same, and with his sound arm he loosed the reins. He was still able to hold his revolver, and probably the Germans feared another shot. Jane was rearing and snorting wildly, and, as he set her free, she tore off at mad speed up the road, and as she went he noticed that she was fired at from one of the still houses which he had ridden past a few moments ago—or was it years? Then his revolver dropped from his hand, and he fell. He had a vague recollection of seeing the face of a man who was wearing spectacles, transformed into a huge, hideous apparition with a raised arm, and after that Kennedy Gleeson know nothing at all.

He did not know that he was carried in and pitched into a small room off the kitchen, where any of the regiment of Königin Luise who wished to, went to look at him and throw the dregs of their wine-glasses in his still face, nor did he know that they spat at him occasionally, by way of varying their attentions, and that the doctor who was in charge attended to his wounds under strong protest.

"It has been done quietly," said the *Oberst* sullenly, "the only danger to the ambush is that the charger the *Engländer* rode may get through," and he returned to the survey of his map. Several of his officers were playing cards in a corner by the light of a candle stuck in a bottle, and the cellars of the *Panier d'Or* had provided them with plenty of red wine. All day long they waited in the darkness of closed houses, and the

screams of the wife of the proprietor died down, for she had been gagged.

"Tell that canary that I do not like her singing," said the *Oberst*, and his orders had been carefully observed.

Towards sunset a party who had been sent out to reconnoitre the position, came back with the news that the little village at the foot of the rise had been evacuated, and that the British troops were gone. The *Oberst* was in a fine rage, as he gave the orders to advance and take up quarters for him in the *estaminet* in the rose-garden.

"Is that *Wildschwein* still alive?" he asked the doctor.

The doctor saluted, and reported that the English officer was not yet dead.

"Leave him then, and the rats can finish him."

The doctor, clad in a long blue coat, with a large red cross on his arm, looked at his high black boots and said nothing for a moment. He was a man with a certain idea of seemliness, and his feelings were by no means blunted. At last he spoke.

"He could be sent back with four of our men who are suffering from fracture," he said reflectively, "and one who I think has got smallpox."

The *Oberst* threw back his bull head and laughed.

"In that case, send him," he said roughly, and the doctor withdrew, and returned to where Kenny Gleeson lay, moaning a little at intervals.

None of his wounds were really serious, and it was more than likely he would make a good recovery. The doctor had placed a piece of coarse sacking under his head, and the light of the sunset filled the room, for there was no further need to keep the windows closed. It was a pitiful sight, so the doctor thought, as he wiped a stain of wine from Kenny's face. He looked a fine noble fellow, and he had fought well, but there was no use in saying anything to the *Oberst*.

The Herr Doktor Rotbach knew his Commanding Officer well, and, though the smallpox case had been a fiction, invented on the moment, it was one which he felt would suffice. War was a new experience to the Herr Doktor, and he was a naturally religious man, with a very full appreciation of what death might bring had one been guilty of any breach of professional faith. As well as this, there was something about Kennedy that stirred his pity. He whistled softly to himself as he put on a fresh bandage, and the sound of his own music added to his desire not to destroy the helpless fellow-creature lying under his hands. What would happen to the English officer later on was no special concern of his. All he could do was to put him into a motor transport to be taken back to a central *Feld Lazarette*, from where he would be despatched, in company with a batch of wounded and prisoners who would be forwarded to some prison camp in Germany.

The house was full of noise and voices speaking in high or guttural German, as the *Oberst* was just about to depart. It was not yet quite decided what was to be done with the gagged woman, but the fate of her husband was sealed.

As the Herr Doktor rose from his knees, having pushed a small box of morphia tablets into Kenny's pocket, he looked out through the window into the courtyard, where rows of green tubs still held stiff little green trees which might have been enormously exaggerated children's toys. A file of the regiment of Königin Luise were doing some dirty work, and they did it cheerfully enough. A group of the poor *esprits forts* had been taken, some in cellars and others in their own houses, and they were now looking their last upon the sights they knew so well. The burnished sky above them, going through its majestic change into evening splendour, shone on their awestruck tormented faces. Once they had been friends or foes,



but in all cases, fellow-townsmen, and they had spent cheery nights in the *Panier d'Or*. Their hands were bound behind their backs, and they were pushed along before the firing-party, who encouraged them by saying that the latest recruits were chosen to do the shooting. Many of them were silent and looked stupefied with all they had been through, but one or two were wildly and desperately aware of themselves and their doom. An idiot was among the wretched train, and he laughed and dribbled, making odd sounds, and, for some reason, his captors had not bound his hands, so he ran, pointing in the scared desperate faces, evidently uneasy, but, in his twilight mind, unable to know how to explain it all. One man began to pray in a high, screeching voice, and it was as though the sound tore the souls of the rest, yet, even so, the proprietor of the *Panier d'Or* remained stiff, proud, and unbroken. The Herr Doktor approved of him, and adjusted his glasses. He hoped that the recruits would shoot straight. It was all very ugly, but then, war is war, and they had most of them attempted resistance; not the idiot, of course, but, in any case, an idiot is best out of the way.

The men were ranged along the wall, and the tubs of tiny trees were hurled over and cast here and there, and the man who was screaming his prayers never ceased to offer up frenzied appeals to the flaming skies over his head. Some of them stood erect, and, at the end, they cried the name of their country to the echoing walls, but some had already fallen to the ground and one had certainly fainted, or so the Herr Doktor fancied, as he looked on critically. The praying man was a victim of hysteria, and evidently the woman in the house had got rid of her gag, for she, too, was uttering her flat, wild cry once more.

At last a volley of shots rang out, and the scene closed. The men all lay where they had fallen, the troops filed back through the courtyard, and the Herr

Doktor heard the sound of a motor coming up to the front of the house. As soon as he had handed over his sick he was going to join the *Oberst* at the *estaminet*. He had been interested in the hysteria case, and also, though rather less so, in the case of the idiot, who had run round the yard and finally crawled on all fours into a corner to die, smitten by half-a-dozen bullet wounds, and watching the gush of his own blood with fascinated insane eyes.

The two fracture cases were packed into the ambulance, and Kennedy, under the charge of a Red Cross orderly, was put on to a stretcher and pushed inside, like a dish going into an oven. Twilight had fallen before everything had been concluded, and no one had received any orders as to what was to be done with the woman, so she was left, locked up in an empty room, and no one thought any more about her.

The night went on, and Kenny was still in his dream. It was not altogether a pleasant dream, and was stabbed through at more and more swiftly recurring intervals, with hot, angry pain. He could hear some one talking a great deal very close to him, and he wanted to curse whoever it was into silence. He also became aware that he was very uncomfortable, and then again sleep closed in like a dense fog and he knew nothing else.

After that space of quiet he seemed to have traversed a long distance and was back at Castle Glenfield. Sometimes he was in the house and sometimes he wandered through the grounds outside, and always he was looking for something which he could not find. And then, with another leap, he was in the coffee-room of the Hotel at Kilvanner, and the fish-women were crying "Fresh hake" so noisily that he felt it to be simply preposterous. Why in the world did they let them make such a hell of a noise?

Time dragged interminably, a derelict tract of no known duration; that night might have been years;

and quite suddenly he remembered Lean Jane, and the hazy recollection of having to do something definite. What was it that he had told himself must be done? Something stopped with a jerk, and the anguish it caused him brought him to an abrupt return to life.

Unknown to himself he had passed through devastated Belgium, lying on the floor of a third-class carriage under an escort of two soldiers of the regiment of Königin Luise, and his recall to a realization of what had happened informed him that he was now lying on a bed of filthy straw in an open cattle-truck, a crowd of strange, hostile faces gazing at him and the other wretched occupants of the miserable bed. The train had drawn up at a station, and, raising himself on his arm, Kennedy could see a glimpse of orderlies, and women wearing large red crosses on their breasts, attending to the needs of the wounded Germans who occupied the lower half of the train.

For a moment he could hardly grasp the full significance of the sight, and then it swept over him with a bitterness of realization which shook him to his soul. He was a prisoner. The *Engländer gefangener* were a side-show for the civil population, and his burning thirst was not nearly as consuming as the rage he felt when he looked at the wounded who shared the cattle-truck, lying deep in the filth of the unclean straw.

They were not very closely packed, which was one mercy, but, alongside of him, a man with a fractured thigh was moaning feebly, and another with a bad shoulder-wound was sitting up stiffly to save his body the agony of the jolting of the train. The others lay face downward; they had been shot through the brain, and probably they were both dead, and had been stifled into eternity.

The violent hostility of the crowd, and the angry ferocity of a fat woman, wearing a boat-shaped hat

and respectable clothing, stung Kennedy into forgetfulness of his own pain. He raised himself, sat up, and signed to his guards, who were standing a little distance off, drinking hot coffee and eating lumps of bread and sausage.

"What are you doing for these men?" he asked, and his knowledge of German came to his aid.

One of the guards strolled towards him, and pushed away the irate old lady in black. He told Gleeson that he was not given any orders, and that, if there was trouble, they would only be taken out of the truck and shot.

Kennedy nodded, and thought for a moment. He was feeling wretchedly weak, and his blood-stained uniform was plastered with dirt.

"Tell the *Gnädige Frau* to go and be frightful somewhere else," he said quite pleasantly; "she bores me."

The guard looked at him and shrugged his shoulders, gulped down another mouthful of coffee, and made a gesture to the woman, who screamed a few more words of abuse and then withdrew to find another subject for her rancour.

"Where is the doctor?" Kennedy demanded. He had managed to get out his cigarette-case, and, lighting one for the two men who were in a far worse case than himself, he knelt with his unwounded arm on the edge of the truck.

The doctor was busy with their own wounded, and the guard motioned him back with his rifle.

"I don't intend to stir," Kennedy replied; "take me out and shoot me if you want to."

The man, who had approached close to the truck, looked up and down the platform, and then spoke quickly.

"Later on I will bring you something. In this station it is impossible." And then he hurried off, as an officer in a faultless pearl-grey uniform came down

the platform and looked contemptuously at the inhabitants of the truck.

"Well," he remarked in English, "you are a credit to your unit. What dirty beasts the English soldiers are."

Kennedy smoked on with unruffled calm.

"I compliment you on your railway-carriages," he said, a wan flicker of his old smile crossing his face. "There are two dead men in here, and quantities of blood and dirt. Come with us as far as the next station, just for the sake of the experience."

The train was getting up steam, and with a nerve-shattering jolt it began to crawl out of the station, to an accompaniment of abuse and vituperation, and then Kenny discovered the little box of morphia tabloids. Who had given them to him he could not guess—it might almost have been miracle. The wretched cattle-truck, with its piteous load of wounded and dead, the stale, foul smells, and the sights and sounds of anguish, was his new world, and, away behind him, there was the clean place where he had felt dissatisfied and restless because of its very peacefulness. Before him, to judge by the sample which he had already experienced, there lay greater ills and more poignant experiences, but, over and above everything else, there was the deadly depression of realizing that he was a prisoner, and that in his present state escape was hopeless, out of reach. They were all starving, but the little morphia tabloids brought with them a drowsy feeling that veiled the fiercer pains.

The man with the gaping thigh-wound was silent, but helpless tears were coursing down his face. He had been very brave, but anguish and dirt and the fear of what lay ahead had been too strong for him.

"Christ, why didn't they kill me?" he said again and again, like the monotonous response to some awful litany, and Kenny, who was thinking of the young Prussian in his grey uniform, felt like murder.

## CHAPTER XII

LARRY GROVE had come back to Adrigole after a day's hunting. He was not feeling quite satisfied about things in general, and many of the old members of the hunt had vanished out of sight to France and elsewhere; and though hunting was certainly the sport of kings, he was well aware that to indulge in it when war was going on outside in Europe was not exactly satisfying. But Larry was deeply rooted into the soil of Adrigole, and he believed that the place would go to pieces if he were to leave. He had made a good thing out of selling horses to the Government, and had travelled the country buying up stock—but this, though useful, in its way, was not quite the same as fighting Germans. January had come, with its sudden bite of cold, and a frost threatened to stop the hunting if it held for another day or two, and the clear green sky over the park foretold a spell of steady winter.

The country was growing very lonely, and all his friends were gradually leaving the place. Dr. Aloysius Barry had been promoted to the position of Field Master, and there had been an all-round shuffling of the cards, so that the social world was really going topsy-turvy. Larry himself had been rushed into the Mastership, and that again had been another reason why he had done nothing about getting a commission. Further, he had been told that cavalry would not be used in the war, and he did not like the idea of infantry work. The South Irish Horse had been made to fight on foot, and all these reasons continued to form one solid argument for his still remaining at Adrigole. As he rode into the kennels, his whips behind him, and the hounds mud-stained and weary after a phenomenal

run, he told himself that he had succeeded in getting everything he had wanted a few months before.

He adored Hilda, and she was his wife. He wanted to be Master of the Kilvanner Fox Hounds, and now he was; and he had made all the alterations in Adrigole of which he had talked to Kennedy Gleeson.

The war had come home to him desperately in the first shock, and he had wanted to leave everything for some weeks, but the feeling had waned, and he had grown used to the idea of it. When Kenny had been reported "missing," the news fell like a death-sentence upon them all, and Larry said that he couldn't leave Hil and poor old Aunt Lucy just in the moment of their direst need.

There had been awful, aching weeks of suspense, so grievous that all joy had entirely vanished out of life; but recovery had come with a postcard written cheerfully by Kenny himself, in which he said that all was well with him, and that he was having the time of his life.

They had all been delighted. Hil felt that at any rate Ken was "out of the war," and that he would be one of those who would return with peace. It was far better, when one remembered the gay words on the postcard, to know that he was spared all the dangers and horrors of a long campaign.

No one knew how he had been taken, and, after a little, they grew used to the idea that he was safe. He was sent everything that widely generous love could provide him with, and there was an unlimited feeling of satisfaction in making up parcels addressed week by week to the Prisoners' of War Camp at Crefeld.

"They don't have at all a bad time," Larry said, repeating the assertion until he firmly believed it. "Of course the letters are censored, and there aren't many of them. Sometimes Kenny doesn't write for weeks together, but he never wrote letters, and I expect that accounts for it." With the inward feeling of slight

dissatisfaction about his own share in the war, or lack of any personal share, Larry was growing conscious that Hilda was not happy. She wouldn't come out hunting except on rare occasions, and she knitted socks with a kind of rage of energy. Sometimes he wondered if she thought he should make the break with the old things, and then she used to cling to him with tensely clasping arms, and look at him silently. He couldn't tell what was going on in Hil's mind, but he knew that she was not her old self any longer. As the others went away she became more and more silent about their going, and she worked at Lady Killiney's sewing-party two days in the week, where she heard letters read aloud by others of her friends who had parted with their men.

Larry watched the hounds go in behind the rails of the kennels and throw themselves down on the clean, sweet straw. They were such a level pack that he smiled with pride at them, and stood watching them lick the mud off their legs, with an almost paternal affection. Their hot food was just coming in huge buckets across the yard, and it was likely that, if the frost meant it in earnest, they would have a comparatively long rest.

As he turned to go into the house Paddy Flannery, the second whip, came up to him and touched his velvet cap. Paddy had a genius for the care of hounds, and when he spoke in a shy, husky whisper, which was his tone when addressing Lawrence Grove, and informed him that he intended to join the army, the announcement came as a blow. Larry heard him out and nodded, as he wound the thong of his crop around his hand.

"It's that me cousin was shot," explained Paddy, who was not equal to any eloquence. "I'd like to be even with dem as did it, sir."

"Quite right," agreed Larry, "of course you should go. I'll put you back when the war is over."



But even as he said the hopeful words, he wondered when that time would be.

Hilda was sitting in the drawing-room close to the fire, and the soft light of a shaded lamp fell on her pale gold hair. The knitting which had occupied her hands had fallen on the floor, and she was looking at the soft red heart of the burning flames with wistful eyes.

She glanced up with a smile of greeting as Larry came in. He always looked his best in hunting clothes; his red coat was stained with long usage, and his boots were covered to the knees in dried mud, for the hounds had run across the bog by Kilvanner Cross, and the going there, even in a frost, was always deep and miry.

Larry crossed the room quickly and took Hilda's hands in his. They lay there passive, and still she held his eyes with her sleepy smile.

"Did you have good sport?" she asked. "Oh, Larry, I often think of how Ken would love to hear hounds again."

"Yes, it's damned hard luck," he said, kissing her, "but I expect they don't have too bad a time."

"I don't know," Hilda replied, and it was the first time that she had ever questioned the truth of his assertion.

"Flannery is leaving," he said, rubbing her hands between his own.

"Why?" she asked quickly. "You'll never get another boy half as good as he is. Do you remember when Trim Bush got yellows, and all the pack went sick?"

"He's joining the army," Larry said slowly, and Hil turned her eyes from his face and watched the fire again.

"Oh, that's it?" She spoke in a dull voice.

Grove got up from his knees and piled some fresh logs on the fire.

"I wish to God I could go," he said suddenly. "If I were a free man I'd have gone long ago." He felt

annoyed by her sudden retreat into that inexplicable silence, which Hil never used to suffer from.

"Larry!" she said, and the name rang like a protest through the room.

"Well, just look at how I am tied. Who is there to look after the place? And now there's the question of the hounds as well. I can't clear out and let you undertake the responsibility of it all. I've always put the idea away." He paced the room with his hands deep in his pockets, and then came to a standstill before her. "If you were in my place, Hil, I don't think that you would act otherwise."

Hilda clasped her hands tightly together and drew a long, deep breath.

"If I were a man," she said, "no consideration would keep me from going—— If I were a man—— oh, if *only* I were a man."

Larry looked at her with startled grey eyes, and then he put his hand on her shoulder.

"So that is what has been wrong," he said, in his soft, pleasant voice. "Why in the world, Hil, didn't you tell me this long ago? It wasn't quite fair, was it, now?"

It seemed as though the conclusion had jumped upon them like a live thing which had been lying in wait, watching for a signal to advance, and when they had finished dinner and were sitting in the smoking-room the sense of change was already with them both.

Was Larry glad to go, Hil wondered? Her own sudden outburst had shaken her a little, for she was naturally very reserved, and Larry was not given to showing what he felt. It was rather as though he had no very strong feeling about it. Now he was going, and she was glad. She believed that she would never be anything but glad, because she did not realize during the hours of that wonderful evening that there were other and different times ahead of her. So they sat

together, Hilda with her head on her husband's shoulder, and discussed what was to be done when he had gone away.

Once he came to look at it as a recognized fact, Larry saw ways and means by which all the difficulties could be surmounted. The Mastership could be undertaken by a Committee, and the steward was really able to manage Adrigole. Hil would stay on there, of course—that was taken as an accepted fact and not alluded to further.

"It will be dull for you, old girl," he said, stroking her soft hair, "but you have Aunt Lucy, and I'll get back now and then for ten days."

"Would you have gone if I had said nothing?" she asked.

Larry thought for a moment, for he was scrupulously honest. "I don't know that I would," he admitted; "so long as I felt that you wanted me I think I should have stayed," and the reply went deep into Hilda's heart like a spear.

Larry did not know, nor did she at the moment, that he was binding a burden on his wife's shoulders.

Aunt Lucy was pleased when she heard the news; she, too, had said very little, but a grim line had come at the corners of her mouth when Larry went in to see her, and had talked of the hounds and the hunting. Her family pride was stung, and her outbursts of anger against the men of the estate who were not flocking to join the colours had of necessity to be curbed. The retort was too obvious, and Aunt Lucy had frequently desired to speak faithfully to Lawrence Grove. She had spoken to Hilda more than once, and asked her what she was thinking of to let that "long-legged man of hers dawdle and dawdle about the place when there was fighting to be done?"

"We have always been a fighting stock," she said. "I don't know what has come upon us, and I wish I

had been put into the vault before I lived to see such goings on."

When Hilda came to tell her that Larry was going at last, she became herself again, and she pressed her niece's hand.

"I'm old and I'm lonely," she remarked in a voice that had a little tremble in it, "and I may never see Ken again this side of Paradise, but now all our own will be in France and that is a great consolation."

The truth was that she revived at the prospect of being able to lash any neighbours of hers who still kept their sons safe and secure in the warm green comfort around; Larry was going and every one was glad.

It was only when he had gone, and the solitude of the house became complete, that Hilda suffered from reaction. She had parted from him very bravely, and had been in an exalted mood to the last minute of their time together. Adrigole had become a place of memories, and she put Larry's things away carefully, for he would want them all when he came back again, and then she tried to fill in the time as best she could.

Around her, in the country, everything went on just the same. Mr. Watts was having a quarrel with the Braydons, large landowners in the parish, who were difficult to manage, and they refused to subscribe to the Sustentation Fund, and went miles off to a church at Kilvanner, to show their displeasure. They wanted to starve Mr. Watts out, if it might be done, and they talked incessantly of the warfare which they waged all through the early spring. People who had not been noticed before, and were on a lower social plane, encroached into the Tennis Club, and, because of the scarcity of the vanishing race, suddenly appeared to inherit the earth.

There were Lady Killiney's sewing-parties, and now and then the more energetic got up theatricals and a sale of work in aid of the Red Cross. The same things

happened, but they had new names, and there was a Red Cross Jumping Competition for the Hunt, and of course there was racing as usual.

The dances held in Kilvanner were ostensibly organized for some charitable purpose, and they continued, even though throughout the County there were numbers of houses closed because of mourning. The people who remained lived just as they had in the days when no one thought of battle and sudden death, and Mr. Watts' week-day Intercession Service died away of itself, as no one attended it.

A change certainly had come, and great records had been splashed in blood on the Roll of Honour, but, generally speaking, the alteration was vague and nebulous, and the state of the country itself gave more cause for alarm than outside thunderings.

It all began to get on Hilda's nerves, and she wondered how long she could stand it. Aunt Lucy was not well, and it was obvious that she could not live very long. She was pretty desperate about Kennedy, and there had been rumours far from reassuring as to the treatment of the prisoners of war in Germany.

"Your a'nt is failing," Dr. Aloysius Barry said, as he stood in the large square hall of Castle Glenfield, talking to Hilda. News from France had been thoroughly depressing, and another push in which Larry's regiment was sure to be involved was imminent. "Indeed I'm sorry for you, Mrs. Grove. It's hard times we're all likely to see." He shook his head sorrowfully, and his round, red face looked saddened and distressed. "I'm afraid for poor Larry. There's not a chance for him to place foot in Adrigole again."

"Oh, Dr. Barry," Hil said with a protesting gesture of her hands, "don't say such things, please don't."

"What would be the use of my bolstering you up with false hopes?" he replied, taking his bowler hat of sporting outline from the table. "But mind this, when the telegram comes, don't break it to your a'nt

without me in the house. Her heart is weak, and it would kill her, mind that, Mrs. Grove," and he climbed into his Ford car and went away down the deserted drive.

To be directly spoken to of something which is already a secret dread, invests the fear with terrific power, and Hilda went into the drawing-room which had once always been a crowded place, and cried her eyes red. She had sent Larry out, there was no getting away from the staring truth of it. The responsibility was hers, and, had she kept silent, he would still be there. She thought only of physical dangers, and, indeed, not without very sufficient reason, and it seemed to her that if anything happened to Larry—if he came back blinded or maimed, she would never find forgiveness in her own heart.

That afternoon the quiet of the place was disturbed by an incursion on the part of Edith Ransome.

Maxie had gone to the war some months later than the rest of his regiment, and Edith was still at The Brambles. She ran down in Lord Kingsway's car, and was, so she said, going away in a few days' time. Kingsway had returned wounded in the early months, and Edith had annexed him on the spot. She had hardly felt her husband's departure, because she had found something of her old zest of capture in the complete conquest of a man who had a reputation for the highest critical faculty where women were concerned. Cork rang with stories of her and her doings—her entire absence of any kind of pretence of anxiety with regard to Maxie and her complete indifference to public opinion. Lord Kingsway came with her, and she showed the same touch of friendliness towards Hilda which had marked her attitude from the first.

Hilda gave them tea in the smoking-room at Castle Glenfield, for she had moved up there since Aunt Lucy fell ill, and she listened to Edith's well-bred, rather discontented voice as she told her that she was thank-

ful to be leaving Ireland and on her way to London. Maxie was getting on well. She disposed of him with a few words, and Hil, who was still at the mercy of Dr. Barry's prophetic utterance, wondered at her with wide eyes. Edith was so entirely herself, and her clothes were even more striking than ever, and she seemed to belong to Lord Kingsway in some indefinite fashion, only hinted at, as he sat silently, taking no trouble to talk to either of them. He, too, was going to London, to take up a War Office job; he confided so much to his hostess. Apparently Maxie didn't really count at all, and Hil wondered if the right people *ever* got the telegram which Dr. Barry had spoken of so plainly. She could imagine Edith reading it without a pang. How, then, were these matters arranged by "the choosers of the slain"? Though a break of any sort was a relief to her in her anxious state of mind, she was glad when they left. She felt rather as though she had been visited by two pagan gods who were perfectly sure of their own immortality, and who could not be moved to tears or grief.

The bell of the Roman Catholic church was ringing out the Angelus as they sped away, following the solitary traces of Dr. Barry's car, and long shadows had come creeping out from the woods, when the crows were flying home, against a western sky streaked with red.

Life seemed so intolerably empty of everything except strain, and Hilda had no right to break under it. The days were each one like a page of a very long and dull book, and, after the *Cork Constitution* had come in the morning, and she had read the war news, there was nothing left to do but endure the rest of the day and hope for a letter from Larry.

Larry's letters were short, and he had no gift of expression, but it grew upon Hilda that he was awakening to a phase which was foreign to her old knowledge

of him. He wrote with brief and slangy intensity about his regiment as though there was nothing else worth mentioning. In the beginning he had asked for the hounds he loved best, by name, and had hardly mentioned his own surroundings, but now it seemed that his surroundings had caught him in a dominating grip. He spoke vaguely of leave, but added that he was doubtful about it, as he couldn't very well be away from the battalion. Hilda read and re-read his straggling scrawls, and in every one of them the information was almost always the same. He liked the other fellows in the mess, and he seemed to take a keen interest in war in a kind of detached way and without any special sense of its real size and scope. When he was just on the eve of return, he was promoted to be captain, and he wrote saying that he had to cancel his chance of getting back.

"I'm longing to be home," he added, and Hilda wondered, with ever-growing surprise, if Larry really was so anxious to be at Adrigole once more. Still she had caused this transformation herself, and she tried to be happy about it. Larry was living with an unwonted vividness in France, and that, after all, was how a good soldier should feel. She had been miserable during the months when it didn't seem to occur to him to go, and now she was very near to being miserable again because he appeared to be so well content.

The postman came as she stood on the steps, speeding her guests into the sunset-light, and she took the letter with its red stamp and number from his hands as she wished the man good-night, and, tearing it open, she read the few lines written inside:

"I like the country and I like the life," he wrote; "it suits me to be dirty for days together, and the battalion is simply grand."

But he hadn't asked for any of the hounds, nor had he spoken a word about coming home on leave.



## CHAPTER XIII

**I**T was late spring when Aunt Lucy died and was buried in the vault in Castle Glenfield Churchyard.

Larry got back in time for the funeral, and he and Hilda decided that Castle Glenfield had better be let. There was no one to live in it, with Kenny still in Germany, and it would suffer if it was abandoned to the rats and damp which would encroach, once it was closed. So Castle Glenfield was taken by a young officer in a regiment of Guards, who had been disabled for war service, and who was still well enough to do some hunting. He was also to take up the Mastership of the Kilvanner Hounds, so that, though the County deplored Aunt Lucy's death, there was still something to be said for an ill wind. Castle Glenfield was to be inhabited by Major Persall, and soon his retinue began to arrive, and, after all, a young man with money to spend is in all essentials a better owner of a place than an old lady with a sharp tongue. Kennedy was, as all knew, having the time of his life in Germany, and until his return the arrangements appeared simply perfect. Major Persall was a bachelor, and would have plenty of friends to stay. It was known already that he was bringing at least six.

When they had "buried Aunt Lucy," as Larry tersely described it, he and Hil were alone again, possessed of a week in which to look at one another and mark any changes which had come in the intervening time.

Hil thought that, outwardly, Larry had improved tremendously. He looked well in his uniform, though

he wore his cap with a sideways tilt which was different to the strict straight line of Lord Kingsway's. He hardly seemed her own, even though he caught her to him with a fierce, gripping tenderness, and could hardly speak of his joy at seeing her again, and she knew that his coming had altered the whole world for her. The days during which she had felt like a sailor becalmed in a fog, vanished at the sound of his voice, and she forgot the endless hours during which she had listened to the drip of the rain and the sound of the wind in the trees. Until now she had hardly realized how utterly lonely she had been all the time. Larry went over the place with her and he took an interest in every trifling alteration. She told herself that she had misjudged him when she felt inwardly that he had ceased to care quite as much as he once used to. She had seen nothing new and done nothing different, and she wondered if she was not dull or had lost something while she was just going on alone. She had her own way of seeing things, though they had to be seen out of the windows of Adrigole, and she had only watched the woods take up their mysterious change after sunset, and heard the Blackwater sing its wild rune to the twilight. They weren't the things you could talk about or describe, but they were constant to her, and she knew what she owed to them.

It was when Lawrence Grove opened the paper one morning, just in the middle of the previous week, that she understood exactly what it was which had happened. Larry looked at her over the breakfast-table, and his eyes, though turned to her, were crowded with other sights than that of his own dining-room, Hilda, and the dogs.

"They are moving up," he said. "By God, Hil, they must be. Of course the papers tell one nothing, but I know. He plunged into the spread sheets again and drank some tea. "They'll be back in St. Néant to-night, in the same billets we had there about four

months ago." He drank some more tea and went on talking.

"It's a damned funny little place, most of it blown to blazes, but one or two streets still standing, and we were in the house that used to belong to the Mayor. I wish you could have seen it, Hil, not at all unlike Kildorrery, only the houses are all yellow plaster, and there are wistarias and creepers on some of them." He left the table and began to wander about the room. "There's a cross-roads beyond the town, and the French are funny devils, for whenever there's a funeral they stick little bits of lath crosses at the junction of the roads, so that you get dozens and dozens of them after a bit." He had almost forgotten her now, and he still kept on describing St. Néant.

At last Hilda laughed.

"Larry," she said, "I believe you're home-sick. What will you do when the war is over?"

He stood still, flickered his eyelids, and smiled back at her as he ruffled his hair with a contemplative gesture.

"Do you know that is the very thing I said to Billy Spain. We were sitting in a café at Dieppe, and we both of us wondered what——" He broke off quickly. "Of course I don't mean that, Hil, but we *did* say it." He sat down again and looked puzzled as he argued out the question.

"We are just the same really," he said, thinking carefully, "but when one gets back one finds things looking as though they weren't half as large and important as they used to be. Do you understand, old girl?"

Hil nodded. "I do," she said; "I believe that if Frank Northcote went to France he would end by realizing that the Killineys were ordinary human beings, and that Lord Killiney's walking-stick wasn't really God's. I believe that if Etta was made to go and drive a motor-lorry, she would have an intrigue

with a sergeant. We are all dying slowly of sheer stupidity."

"You see," continued Larry, still trying hard to explain himself both to himself and his wife, "one gets used to all sorts of wild conditions. You go up the line and you mayn't ever come back. That's one piece of excitement. You may do something really good, and then there's the perpetual shifting from one place to another. You get to know the people in the villages and one talks to them. It took me the devil of a time to attempt it, but I can do it now."

"And we talk about the Bishop and Mr. Watts, and whether May Lestrangle will manage to marry Major Persall when *he* comes, and whether Franky Dennison is likely to be sold up for debt, and why it is that Doyle, though he says he is working for the Government, takes in all the Sinn Fein papers."

But Larry did not heed her interruption.

"I like the French," he said. "There was an old woman called Judith Moulin who looked after me in one place. I was there when one of her sons was reported killed, and she went on cooking the omelette. 'See, monsieur,' she said, 'even though men die one may not waste the eggs,' and afterwards I found her breaking her poor old heart crying. A shell fell on the stable roof an hour after, but she didn't seem to mind it. . . ."

Hilda felt as though she was looking out now through Larry's window instead of her own, and she understood.

"And when it is all over it will be hard in a way ever to live the old life as one used to do," he ended lamely and a little shamefacedly, for it was not an easy confession to make.

Hil was thinking hard, and it suddenly seemed to her that if she was to be part and parcel of the old life, Larry might find that she, too, was lacking in some necessary quality. She did not say anything about it

just then, because she felt the world to be a very wide place and she had never gone anywhere alone. Though she was not dependent, and she was prepared to go anywhere while she was on a horse, she was subject to qualms and tremors in a crowd. To be left alone in the paddock at Punchestown, as she said herself, caused her a sense of dismay, and this feeling had to be reckoned with. If she was agitated by a Punchestown crowd, where she knew a good number of the people, how would she feel if she cut loose and went to London?

Larry was now talking about his Irishmen, and it appeared that the boy who used to drive the bread van had died a hero. "If he hadn't gone to France he wouldn't have lost his life," was the phlegmatic comment of his own relatives, but as described by Larry the story was one which deserved to be written in letters of gold. Flannery, too, was inimitable, and they had gathered a scratch pack and did a little hunting with the bobbery crowd. Larry, who had been a black Protestant and eyed all Catholic priests with great suspicion even when they were good sportsmen, was now altered entirely in this respect as in others. "You should see Father O'Grady," he said over and over again. "The men adore him, and small wonder, for he goes up under fire to give them the last rites. He ought to get a V. C." And, after all that, was Larry coming back to sit and listen to Mr. Watts every Sunday? Mr. Watts, who might have gone, and frequently said that he wished to go, but who, having married a wife, felt that it "wasn't his work." Instead, he fought at home and kept up hostilities with the Braydon family. Hilda shivered and felt that she had a sense of communion with the Reverend Mr. Watts.

"There's a man in the Batt," Larry went on, "who I intend to make first whip when I come back, James Freeny. He was with me in the show at Rat Castle, as

we called the place. He saved the house dog, and the fellow can ride. Most men will save a comrade, but that man went out to bring in a dog. By God, Hil, he'd be grand with the pack."

"And what will you do with Donovan?" she asked curiously.

"Donovan?" Larry pulled at his diminutive moustache. "What will I do with Donovan, is it? Why, Hil, he's not been to France at all. There will be other work for him.

The awful definiteness of it was not to be denied.

"You see," again he began to explain, "you only really *know* what men are made of when you have stuck through the kind of thing we get out there. We all thought Pat Hennesy a dirty little rotter, but since he went out to France, you should hear what they've got to say. And then there was Jerdyke, who was everlastingly bucking and talking; he was going to win the war on his own, but I tell you, a tamer specimen of a soldier I never saw. Talk of trench feet, his were frozen on the way out."

Hilda sat considering him in her quiet, careful way. She was responsible for this new Lawrence Grove, in so far as she had given him the necessary push into this world where he was supremely happy.

"I think," she said slowly, "that things will be very difficult in heaps of ways which no one expects when peace comes."

"Do you?" asked Larry in a puzzled voice. "Well, naturally no one will pay much attention to men like Jerdyke, and we all know so much more about each other. It's a sort of liberal education, Hil—— But to think of the Batt going into billets in St. Néant." He moved restlessly again. "They'll be awfully glad to see them back there. They liked us far better than the English or Scotch, and my servant, Casey, knitted a pair of stockings for the little boy at the *Renard Rouge* the last time we were there. I wonder if he

has them still? A good little chap he was, too, and he swore like nothing you ever heard."

Hilda felt that the town of St. Néant stood solid in its tragic ruins between her and Larry, and she looked at him as though she already guessed what was coming.

"If they get any sort of tearing in the line they will be short," he said reflectively. "My own Company, for instance; there's only Doran who could be really trusted to—that is, I don't think that Craddock is any use. He's a bit windy. If Doran gets hit, I hardly know what they would do about Craddock."

It was just the way he used to talk about the hounds, but he wasn't thinking about the hounds now.

"I believe you ought to go," said Hil, and her voice was wonderfully well under control. "Do you think so, Larry?"

He didn't say what he thought, but he looked at her with grateful eyes.

"Hil, would you mind dreadfully if I cut the time short?"

"I don't see how you can help it."

"It's this feeling that you want to be with the men," he said sorrowfully, "though I hate to leave you here all alone. It must be lonely for you. Couldn't you get a friend to stay?"

Hilda fiddled with her crumbs, for she and Kennedy had several of the same tricks.

"There is Elodie. I'd rather have her than any one, but she is working in London. Every one I know is doing something, even Mrs. Ransome, who told me that she was going over to dance with men on leave. She said it kept them cheerful."

Larry drew a deep breath like a sigh.

"I like to think of you in Adrigole," he said in troubled tones. "It's so different if I know you're safe from air-raids and all that sort of thing. But then the country seems end-ways up, and from what Constable Heggarty told me, it's quite likely that there

will be trouble over here. Hil, could you bear to leave the place, or would you rather stay on?"

"With Ken in Germany and you in France, it's not Adrigole any longer," she said, and her eyes filled with tears. "To have Kenny built up behind this awful silence and only to get those wretched little letters isn't much more use than going to a clairvoyant and telling yourself that some one you love is talking to you, and saying *such* stupid things."

"Could you bring yourself to join Elodie?"

Hil stared through the window at the sunny morning outside and thought how often she had put the same question to herself. To be *in* things, instead of sitting waiting for time to pass. To be doing something among others of her own age, to escape from the tepid stagnation of circumstances. She had thought of it with feverish longing times and times again. So long as Aunt Lucy needed her she could see no hope of escape, but now Aunt Lucy was "singing among the angels," so Mr. Watts had said when he pronounced his oration over her coffin.

"I'll write to Elodie," she said, "and then, if I can manage it, I think I shall have to go away. But not for *long*, Larry, I couldn't bear to be away for long. It would seem like ending everything one most values."

He took her in his arms and kissed her. There was something that neither of them could help about it. You just saw that there was an alteration and could do nothing to stop it.

"Do you suppose that Kennedy will come back quite different?" she said, raising her face with a smile. "You, a madly keen soldier—and you always hated soldiers because they would ride over the line—I, changed into a Government official, talking about things I have never even heard of yet. What Elodie is like I don't know, but I suppose she, too, is not just the same; and Ken—what *will* have happened to Ken?"



I get awfully worried about him sometimes, Larry. I don't believe that it's all right for them there."

"Has anything been heard of Harrington?" Larry asked, evading the duty of making any clear statement with, for him, some subtlety.

Elodie says that he hasn't been wounded. You know that he got a D.S.O.?"

"I know," said Larry with a twist of his mouth. "He's still on the Staff."

Larry Grove left for France the next morning, and Hilda watched him with fascinated eyes. He was sorry to go, but at the same time he was possessed by a far stronger power than any which Adrigole had once wielded over him. It was one of those drenched blue mornings, when a wild night had given place to a fair day, and the clouds still hung low over the mountains, and the colour was deep and strong. Lord and Lady Killiney came to call in the afternoon and stayed fifteen minutes, into which they packed the requisite amount of condolence as to Aunt Lucy's death and the departure of Larry for France. When they had gone, Hil took up her pen and began to write her daily letter to her husband.

What fool was it who said that the pen was mightier than the sword? she asked herself. It was a ridiculous statement, and whoever made it should be sent to fight with a stylo in his hand, just to see if he really believed his dictum. She told herself that she was stagnating, and that her thoughts were growing insignificant and contracted under the action of her brain. Just over the writing-table there hung a portrait of Larry's grandmother, a woman with a simper, wearing ringlets, and dressed in amber silk; yet she had held the house in a Fenian rising, and had climbed the garden wall and shot a man with what Hil supposed must have been a blunderbuss. She had driven back the invaders with her handful of servants, and, so the story went, gathered a bunch of lilacs on her return

through the garden and then arranged them in a vase in the hall. She managed to remain the same under difficulties.

And then Hil began to think of her old self and wonder where it had got to. Was she the Hilda Gleeson who had danced her satin shoes to holes at the hunt balls of other times? The Hilda who was subject to waves of strong religious sentiment when the wheezy old organ played "For all Thy Saints," the Hil who had wept with the force of her own strong love for Larry when there was a big moon in the sky and she had looked out of the room in Castle Glenfield down on Adrigole.

The afternoon post brought her a letter from Elodie.

"I am writing to you like the blacks on a missionary card to say, 'Come over and help us.' Can't you manage it, Hil? Suppose we took a small flat when my mother goes back to Wales." And at the end, in a postscript, "What news is there from your brother?"

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## CHAPTER XIV

**A**FTER three days' journey, during which time his wound became so much worse that he was becoming anxious about the state of his arm, Kennedy arrived at last at Crefeld.

His first destination was not to be the *Husaren Kasernen*, where the officers who were taken in war were assembled, but the *Lehrerseminar*, which sheltered some hundreds of wounded, and he found himself lying in a small bed in a long room where it seemed to him that every second man was dying in unnecessary agony.

Kenny had spent much of his own strength in fighting for the two wounded soldiers who had shared his cattle-truck, and he had managed to get the more seriously wounded taken out of the train at Cologne. He had watched the faces of every soul who came to look at them in their dirt and misery until he saw one which promised a response. The Direktor of the Seminary at Cologne had come with the crowd to stare, he being a volunteer administrative officer for the duration of the war, and Kennedy, who searched vainly along the staring rows of faces, caught his mild eye and began his campaign at once. He literally hurled himself into the speech he made, addressing the Direktor personally, and asking nothing for himself, he only demanded instant relief for the man whose condition was enough to stir the pity of the most stony-hearted.

Kenny's beard was of three days' growth, his eyes were strained and blood-shot, and his uniform would have disgraced a tramp, but in spite of this his natural force conquered the fire of fever in his blood. There

was trouble with the guards, there were a thousand difficulties to encounter, but the point was to get the man taken to hospital.

"We shall bring another corpse to our destination, whatever corner of hell it may be where we are going to, *mein Herr*," he said, bending out of the truck and catching the Direktor by the arm. "It isn't a very great concession to ask, only so far I have seen no one else who dared to use the smallest authority."

The Herr Direktor's face altered. He was touchy about the question of authority, and he decided that it was an occasion when it might be used with advantage. A Red Cross orderly, who had made no offer to help either Kenny or any other of the wounded British on the train, was called up, and after some dignified conversation, combined with a great show of etiquette upon the part of the officer in charge, the doctor and the Herr Direktor, Kennedy realized that his appeal had brought forth some result. The man was removed from the truck, and some one threw a coarse brown blanket over the gaping wound in his thigh. They laid him on a stretcher in the centre of a crowd, who appeared to be entertained by the sight, and then the train went on once more.

It had meant steady and persistent effort to keep the feelings which surged like madness in the heart under the tight grip of control, and it had been ghastly to a man who had not experienced the discipline of war and battlefields to come suddenly into such a life as that which now unrolled itself before his eyes. It was only a week since he had crossed to France, and he had felt then that there were some things which could not happen. The stories he had heard of the treatment of the civil population of invaded towns had been ghastly enough, but Kenny was not very imaginative, and he had been thinking of other things. Following upon his arrival he had been sent on at once to join the Battalion under Colonel Grey, and within three

days he was a prisoner in the hands of the enemy. Everything had happened so quickly, and there had been no time to readjust preconceived standards. He had awakened in a foul cattle-truck, and he had been forced to look on, through hours in which time appeared to be at a standstill, at the anguish of his fellow-travellers.

Never in his life before had he been at the mercy of authority, and the insolent manner of the man who relieved his first and more friendly guard, was like salt on a raw cut. The experience was searing itself deep in his soul, and as his own condition altered for the worse, he had to set his teeth and grip hold of his anger to keep from involving his broken fellow-traveller in a futile fight which would only end in rifle-shots. He cared nothing now that he looked like a vagabond, and that his appearance was a cause for coarse jests upon the part of the immaculately dressed Prussian officers who came to stare at him whenever the train stopped at a station.

No one had thought fit to remove the bodies of the two men who lay stiff and ghastly in the bottom of the truck, and Kennedy, whose arm was giving him starts of red-hot anguish, had been able to do nothing to make their state less terrible. Flies had come in swarms whenever the train stopped for any time, and rose in a buzzing cloud from the poor battered faces of the dead. From the trucks behind there came the constant and unceasing sound of souls in torment, and so the trainload went onwards into Germany as the crowd made their coming a holiday and the greeting of "*Schweinhund Engländer*" was shouted until it became familiar. At Kempen some more scarecrows, all wounded and tied up with bandages which had not been changed for days, arrived and were added to the party, and then Kenny was taken from the truck and sorted out from among the men, with other cases which were to be sent to the *Lehrerseminar* when they

arrived in Crefeld. They were pushed into a house while they waited for the next train, and Kennedy and an officer who had lost one eye, and another with a huge running sore on his body, as well as some who were only slightly wounded, were herded into a big draughty house inhabited by an officer of the Divisional train.

Herr Hauptmann Geldern was in good spirits as he sat at the head of the dinner-table, and it occurred to him that he might amuse himself after his own fashion. As the prisoners turned up it was obvious that seats had been prepared for the full number, but the Hauptmann, who seated himself and spread out his arms, regarded them all with a laugh. He addressed them as "Brothers in Arms" and "Fellow-soldiers glorious," and said that he was immensely honoured to find that fifteen officers of celebrated British regiments had come so far for the pleasure of dining in his company. They should dine, he said, but he, a mere German, could not feel himself worthy of such distinguished guests. Therefore, and he laughed again at the idea, they were all to stand where they were and when he had finished he would withdraw in due humility. He had singled Kennedy out as he discerned insubordination in his eyes.

"And you, are you a Lord?" he ended as he gulped his soup with noisy exuberance.

Kenny was standing near the door of the room, the other men alongside of him; he stood there like a flaming magnet, drawing the whole of the enemy's fire. All through his life he had known that he exasperated a certain small type of person; they hated him for something which he was, and their own sense of inferiority made them bitter antagonists. There is nothing that galls the mind of the mediocre so acutely as the heritage of assurance and indifference which goes to make up a very definite personality. He had immediately affected the Herr Hauptmann Geldern. He

was at his mercy in the physical sense, for Kenny was all but starving, but he only smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"I am not proud," he said, "but, speaking on behalf of myself and the rest of us, we prefer to dine alone."

The time which Geldern took to eat his meal was prolonged to an hour, during which period they stood, leaning against the dirty whitewash of the damp-mottled wall, listening to Geldern, who seemed to feel that he had better leave Kennedy alone, while he began to talk to his servant. He delivered a lecture to the man upon the war, which, he said, the English had forced upon Germany, and he explained that every British soldier carried a spike in his pocket to gouge out the eyes of his enemies when they lay helpless and at his mercy. They also used dum-dum bullets and acquitted themselves in every way like barbarians and butchers. At length he grew weary, and getting up from the table, he upset the contents of his plate over the cloth, and, swaggering out, with one more angry look at Kennedy, left them to eat what remained. They were then told that they could sleep on the floor, and that straw would be brought in when the dining-table was removed.

It was only one little incident in the sickening experience. Kennedy never forgot the house behind the railway station at Kempen, the town where Thomas à Kempis had been born, and where, so the legend ran, he had written the *Imitatio Christi*. Certainly he had left very little of his teaching in the hearts of his own townsmen.

Before midnight Kenny was in high fever, and had to be removed in a railway carriage, lying on the seat, with the coat of one of his fellow-travellers for a pillow. He knew and saw nothing of the town of Crefeld as he was driven to the *Lehrerseminar*, and for weeks he lay in a small bed near to a window,

caught in the tedious dreams of intermittent fever, which wore itself out and gave place to a spell of enduring wakefulness and persistent insomnia. And all the time he had heard nothing from home, nor had word of his own people. He had not been able to write at first, and when at last he crawled over the border to convalescence, he managed to send the cheering post-card which had restored every one at home to contentment. The room was long and bare, and, for the first time, Kenny began to realize that he was a prisoner of war, and that he would never be alone. He had always sought solitude and had travelled the world into places where he could get away from people. Now he was lying in a room with fifty other patients, some too ill to occupy themselves with anything but drawing their next laboured breath, and some well enough to talk continually. In the morning when the beds were made the sight was sufficiently ugly to have been yet another circle in the Inferno. The wounded were thrown on to stretchers, which usually were not covered with anything but a thin blanket, and at the end of the proceeding they were taken and replaced in their beds with the same blank indifference to their state. The smell of benzine and iodoform was thick in the air, mingling with the smell of blood. You could never get away from the smell of blood, with its bitter, acrid tang. The hospital was a home of torture, and all day and all night the sound of it continued, and amid it all Kenny felt desperately lonely, and battled fiercely against his weakness and depression. Every morning a file of stretchers went down the middle of the ward, bearing men with grey faces who were going out for operation, and later they returned, covered up like corpses. Later on again they would awaken from the effects of chloroform, and then a new phase of semi-delirious crying would arise in the ward.

As he grew stronger, he wondered how soon it



would be possible to escape from the *Lehrerseminar* and get to a prison camp. So long as he was a hospital case life was unbearable, and escape practically out of the question. Through the noise and during the long nights, when the air was filled with the tedious breathing of men who were on the confines of eternity, or the incessant wandering talk of others who dozed rather than slept, Kenny cherished the thought of escape. It would be worth while to get well, and worth while to struggle back to health, with that end in view. He was over his fever, and the wound, which had suffered from heavy complications owing to neglect and dirt, was healing gradually. The Doktor, Ludovic Kierberg, had told him that in a week or two he expected to be able to discharge him finally, and had said in a more or less friendly voice that the scar on his shoulder would be a memento for him.

"You will not be so anxious to kill Germans another time, *nicht so?*" he said as he probed with a sharp instrument, which he used with consummate skill.

Kennedy laughed and bit his lips hard. The pain was damnable, and it had to be endured every morning, until the hour loomed up like an hour in hell long before it struck.

"No, naturally," he said as Doktor Kierberg put a hand on his neck and bent his head sideways; "I love them."

Doktor Kierberg was hurt, or at least so Kennedy gathered from the sudden vigour of the horrible probe.

"Still, I am sorry for you," said the doctor. "This is a good *Krankenhaus*, and you have been well attended to. You will not like your camp life so well, perhaps, when you get there."

"You have inoculated me with all sorts of new feelings and ideas," Gleeson said as he stood up and pulled

on his torn shirt. "I have learnt a lot, though it hasn't been a specially pleasant form of education."

"*Ach*," said Doktor Kierberg, "you do not expect to find in a *Krankenhaus* a theatre or a circus? This is foolish."

Gleeson made way for a young French officer, who was carried in and laid on the operating table. They had been at different ends of the same ward and he knew the boy by sight. He was one of the cheeriest of the patients, and his bright, clever face had attracted Kenny.

Even before he left the room Doktor Kierberg was at work with his forceps on a deep leg wound.

"Well," he said with a flat smile, "do you like that, my patriot?" He had touched a projecting bone, and Kenny could only imagine the atrocious pain he caused.

The young Frenchman stared him in the eyes and a kind of duel went on between the two men. Great drops of sweat were rolling down his face, and Kennedy saw the wound gape open under the pressure of the doctor's merciless grip. His hands were red, like the hands of a butcher, and before Gleeson could see the conclusion of the hideous incident, he was snatched by the shoulders and pushed outside the room, for an orderly had caught the look in his face and acted at once.

It was awful. Awful to know that such things could be; awful to be forced to see the torments of others. All his own smaller discomfort was literally as nothing to him in the face of the far greater misery which others had to bear. As he grew stronger, and was allowed to go out a little into the garden, he felt his old spirit begin to revive. The hospital, with its ornate roof and the effect of still being a school, stood in a prim, set garden, where the patients sat along the paths absorbed in their lamentable condition. Some were wonderfully cheery, and Kenny's own gay

way of adapting himself to circumstances returned to him. There was no other British officer in the numbers who were gathered there, but he made friends among the French and Russians, who seemed to find something strong and audacious in his attitude.

He was still in the same place when he got his first mail from home, and he sat under a willow, the nearest attempt he could make towards privacy, and read the precious bundle through slowly. He was wearing a brown coat of German make, such as the men in the hospitals all wore, and Hil said that she had sent him everything she could think of. It was splendid to think that he was well and that he was so well treated, and she told him that they were just beginning the cub hunting when his card had arrived. Larry was still at home.

Dim shadows of the realities which were no longer his came flickering across his mind as he read. Hil was a good letter-writer of the discursive kind, and she had a lot of cheerful little stories to recount. Mr. Watts had called often to ask for Ken, she said, and every one was anxious. Now they were all happy again, though the war really did look like lasting some time. She begged of him to say what he wanted, and she had sent him all kinds of frivolous things with his uniform and thick clothes. Elodie was in London, and had wired to her when the card arrived, "because, Ken dear, I may as well tell you that it nearly broke her heart when we heard and didn't know if we were ever to see you again."

There was a letter from Aunt Lucy, in her pointed, elderly handwriting, in which she said that she wished she was a young man, and if she were she would not be at Adrigole. Her own span of time was running out, and she told Kenny that, after the war, there would be none of the old people left alive, and that she hoped he would not forget her advice.

"If the time ever comes when you have to put away

your scruples about that fine young fool, Harrington, don't be like Martin Hefferman, who is tramping the roads of Cork this day because his conscience was so tender that he was never able to strike a bargain."

The roads of Cork—how very far away they were from the *Lehrerseminar*, and how long would it be before Kenny was likely to walk them again? The letters he read called up so many pictures, and he almost forgot where he was, until Étienne Verdeau came across the grass on his crutches and looked in through the green of the hanging branches to where Kenny sat.

"Ah, *mon ami*, you have a bundle of memories," he said, taking his seat on the bench; "I, too, have received news."

"Good, I hope," Kenny said laconically.

"My house is in ruins and my wife a refugee in London," he said slowly. "It is war, monsieur."

"I shall get out—somehow," Kenny said with sudden violence. "Give me her address in case I do."

Verdeau looked at him and smiled as he scribbled a name on a piece of paper.

"I think you will get out," he said reflectively.

And so the time dragged by, and Kennedy came to the day when he was discharged from the *Lehrerseminar*. He was to go to the *Husaren Kasernen*, and he parted from the friends he had made in the ward with a touch of regret. He was longing to be away, but it seemed hard for the others. For five interminable months he had been an inmate in that house of torture and terror, and, now that the time was over, he felt he had passed into a new phase. It was much the same as though he had lived in a cage governed by wild beasts, and there he had learnt the power of patient courage. They had redeemed the experience, his poor comrades, and now he was never likely to see any of them again.

He drove through Crefeld in a ramshackle old fly, a guard with a rifle between his knees sitting opposite to him.

"Not crying to be out of there, *was?*" the man asked, jerking his thumb towards the building. "They bury men by the dozen; and bits of men—legs, arms—*ach*, I am told that the Herr Stadtpfarrer will now no longer read any service unless the corpse is a whole corpse."

"Anyhow I have not had to trouble him," said Kenny, his glance turned on the streets.

It was a wildly new experience to see streets and people again, and to be amid life, movement, and shops and cafés, where men and women went in and out. He reached the *Husaren Kasernen* at twilight, just as Crefeld was bathed in purple shadows and the little breezes of evening were whispering in the trees.

## CHAPTER XV

**K**ENNY GLEESON looked at his new quarters, when he had driven through the gates which clanged heavily behind him. There was nothing either picturesque or romantic about the place, and a high brick wall bounded the gravel parade-ground and a further playing-field which was used as a football-ground. In the centre of the bare, detached blocks of buildings there was a bath-house, and, within the walls, some hundred yards from the prisoners' quarters, there was a reserve lazarette, in which, so he learnt later, there were fifty or so of wounded English officers, abominably neglected and lying on sacks of straw covered with coarse linen sheets. These men were at the mercy of a sentimental orderly who made ardent love to the servants in the houses down the Nord Strasse. He was not unkindly, nor were the visiting doctors unkind; they merely let the patients alone to live or die as the case might be.

As the ramshackle fly drove in through the open doors the sentry looked in at the window and grinned in Kennedy's face.

"Welcome to England," he said with a laugh; "you will find plenty of friends inside."

"Here you may walk and take exercise," said the man who was guarding him as he ordered him to get out, and he added, "No one escapes from Crefeld, Herr Lieutenant. If I were you I should not try." He shut one eye and made a gesture as though aiming his rifle at a departing fugitive.

When his luggage had been piled in a heap, Kennedy, clad now in a new suit of uniform, shaved and washed, and generally more or less in his right mind,

was handed over to a German N.C.O. who was his jailer. They eyed each other squarely, and the man touched his round cap with one finger. There was nothing in the shape of military discipline in the salutation, and it was really more an impulse on the part of the *Unter-Offizier* than a salute.

As he passed into the guard-room, Kenny looked round, and the leaping rise and fall of light fell on the solid, stubborn faces of the men, and, before he was passed through into the barracks, he was told to sit down in a chair placed in a recess near the window.

Some one lighted a flare of gas, and the guard-room began to fill with soldiers. Kennedy did not look at them. He took his place in the chair and waited, his eyes on the fire. At times his sense of detachment from the surroundings where he was, became very complete. The soldiers were changing guard, and, before he could be attended to, the *Unter-Offizier* was examining the rifles to see that they were all loaded. The fire was made of pine-logs, and the logs burnt with violent little spurts of blue, orange, and crimson. Showers of sparks shot out now and then, and the sight of it carried Kennedy back to his old shooting camps, and to woods he had known and loved.

He began to wonder if Elodie and Teddy were still engaged, and if he would get back before anything else happened. How does one answer such questions? There would be no exchanges until the war was over. He had been told that fact dozens of times by the Herr Doktor, who liked to impress it on his patients—certainly no exchange for an able-bodied *Engländer*. Perhaps some of the men whom he was just about to meet would be able to tell him something. Many of them had arrived quite lately, and he had months of news to recover. He started, as he remembered that he had told Harrington that in six months he would tell Elodie that he wanted to marry her, and now the

six months had gone, and what chance had he to tell her anything? It was like being buried alive. . . . Thoughts came and went and tormented him in their shadowy passing. He felt as though he had left everything half-finished, half-said, and inconclusive. The time, which could be counted by hours, in which he had tasted some of the thrill and excitement of battle, was so cursedly short. Into it, for a scuffle in a passage, and then out of it—God, how hopelessly out of it, for a totally unlimited tract of time. Then the journey with its brutality and filth, the first introduction into the knowledge which time had brought to fulness, and, following upon all that, the *Lehrerseminar* with all its sights and sounds unspeakable. Poor decency cowered and fled from the place; what does one do with such memories? Can they be left behind when, somehow, a man gets out? Can they be blotted out and covered over; is any darkness deep enough to hide them away? The *Unter-Offizier* examined Kenny's luggage, and he awoke from his thoughts and glanced up. The guards were filing out under the charge of a whey-faced corporal, who, so Kenny thought, looked at him with more than usual truculence from behind a pair of rounded spectacles.

"Have you any maps, cameras, firearms, or fountain-pens?" asked the *Unter-Offizier*.

Kenny laughed irrepressibly.

"No, but I have a grand piano and a dining-room table, which you will find under that pile of handkerchiefs."

He felt completely indifferent, and he listened to the questions and made his replies with Asiatic detachment. Already he hated the place, and its narrow, crushing sense of confinement. He was then provided with a paper, headed, "Requests to Prison Governors," which he looked at with a touch of amusement.

"What does one write here?" he asked.



The jailer, whose name he learnt was Urlaub, made a deprecating movement with his hands. It would really be as well to leave the page blank. The prison authorities took requests rather badly—in short, it was as well to say nothing at all. Some of the officers had asked for rooms to themselves, and it only made things more difficult. The *Kommandant* was irascible at times, though, he remarked in an informing voice, he was "*nicht schlecht*," only questions were a mistake, and demands even more so.

At length *Unter-Offizier* Urlaub rang an electric bell, and summoned the corporal who had stared with so much hostility. It actually had to matter now to Kenny whether these people hated or tolerated him, and the knowledge made him intensely quick at reading the faces of the people he had to deal with. He had always been able to read through the eyes of the men and women he met, and now, after his long prison experience, his old power was accentuated.

The corporal was armed, and led the way up a staircase and through a door which opened into the prisoners' quarters. Beyond this there was a broad stone-flagged corridor, whitewashed and lighted by huge windows, which overlooked the parade-ground, and the crown of barbed wire which made its thorny rust-red wreath along the high brick wall of the *Husaren Kasernen*. Urlaub had told Gleeson that there were about six hundred allied officers who were "guests" in the Crefeld prison. French Territorials, who had been taken at Maubeuge, sent to there from Valenciennes with reinforcements, never dreaming that the strong fortress town on the Sambre was to collapse so quickly; Russians of Samsonoff's Warsaw Army Corps, Belgians from Liège, and about two hundred British, mostly taken in the early weeks of the war.

The arrangement was, that twelve officers of mixed nationalities lived together in each small room, and

Kenny inquired anxiously whether he could see a list of the names.

"I'd like to know something about the membership," he said, laying a finger on Urlaub's sleeve; on the whole he liked the man well enough. "When one becomes a member of a new club it is always interesting to know how many enemies one is likely to meet. You understand me, Mr. Urlaub, I ask out of curiosity."

Urlaub shook his head. He was good-natured, and he would have liked to have gratified Kennedy if he could, but he felt that he had already shown too distinctly that he sympathized with his jail-bird.

"Then you must meet your friends or enemies unprepared," he said; and he handed Gleeson on to the corporal with the pale complexion, dotted about with angry-looking red spots, and his ridiculous air of great ferocity.

Kenny was walking down the passage, glad to think that at last he would meet some one whom he could talk to, when a man came out of a room at the far end, and stood looking at him. It was George Palliser, and he recognized him with a burst of strongly-expressed welcome.

"By God, Kenny Gleeson, what the devil are you doing inside this place? We heard that you'd gone to hell or the other alternative." He wrung his hands with intense fervour, and Kenny thought he looked very much the same. His deep, resounding voice had thinned away a little, and he had a whole network of lines around his eyes.

"They didn't finish their job," Kenny said, returning his greeting, "so here I am. I'm damned glad to see you, George."

The corporal growled irritably from behind, and Palliser signed to Kennedy to come in.

"There's a vacancy in our banqueting hall," he remarked, "and you are the lucky man to fill it, I

suppose. This morning they took off Rattray; he was sick. Gone to the black hole out there—the reserve lazarette. A healthy spot.”

With the guard still grunting viciously at his heels Kennedy made his way beside Palliser into a room which served as living and sleeping room alike. The furniture consisted of a large deal dining-table, with a small table and a chair for each officer. The only washhand-stand was between the windows, and two chests of drawers did duty for the whole number. There was no paper on the walls, no carpet on the floor, and no curtains to the windows. The place was hopelessly gaunt and bare, and the beds in the room were made of planks scarcely three feet broad, laid on iron trestles, and covered with a mattress which was in reality a coarse-canvas sack stuffed with paper and straw. The company consisted of George Palliser, Kenny himself, a Major Compton, and a subaltern called Bland. With these there were two Russians who could speak no English, and three officers of a French Cavalry regiment. Compton was the senior officer, and so presided over the mess, and the hours for meals were printed on a card which hung by the stove.

Breakfast, 7 A.M.; lunch, 12.30; dinner, 7 P.M.; and lights out at 10 P.M. Each prisoner was at that time entitled to write one letter a day; once a month he was allowed to have a hot bath, and once a week the doctor and the hairdresser came to visit the prison.

Kennedy walked into the crowded room, and Palliser went through the form of introduction.

Compton looked up. He was a small man with a round face and a loud, dominating voice. All his life he had never been wrong about anything, and it had been a heavy blow for him to find himself a captive. His Colonel, to whom he had been Second-in-Command, was an old adversary of his own, and, though he had been killed when Compton was made prisoner,

he pursued his shade with unrelenting violence into the next world, and considered that he was to blame for the disaster.

"Well, you've come to a nice place," he said in his angry way; "I don't know who you are—not a regular? I thought not; but I'm sorry for you;" and with that he turned once more to the letter he was writing to his wife.

Bland was a very young officer indeed, with more than a touch of poetry in his soul. Palliser described him as being like a good-looking codfish. He had pale hair and pale eyes, and he rhymed persistently over the paper he was provided with. In fact, he very nearly imagined himself a Crusader in the hands of the Infidels, and with this idea in his mind he wrote verses to Dolly, the girl to whom he was informally engaged. Palliser, whose crude and realistic effect had been more emphasized than lessened by his experiences, was by far the most cheerful of the three, and laughed in a noisy way and jeered at every one who showed any kind of sentimental side to his character. Jules de Beussent, a Cavalry Captain, was, so Kenny thought, by far the most attractive of the whole collection, and, though at one time his temper would have risen and his heart sunk at having so small and tightly limited a space in which to live, he thought of the hospital ward, and realized that this was, by comparison, a Paradise on earth.

Palliser had a gramophone which Compton detested, but which both the Russians, inarticulate of necessity except between themselves, and the French, enjoyed enormously. It stood on a small table and tore the heart-strings of Bland, who had danced, not so very long ago, to the waltzes it ground forth. They all got rid of each other during the time which was given up to exercise, and then you had a chance to meet other Englishmen from the other rooms, or you might visit them and sit on their beds and tell stories.

"First of all I felt as if I was ill, and had got into some beastly hospital," Bland said pathetically; his nerves were still strung up, and he was horribly anxious to propitiate the guard and the *Kommandant*, when the latter swooped down upon them and rode through their quarters. "After that it was more like being in a workhouse, and now I feel as if it were a lunatic asylum."

"Which is all very encouraging to you, Gleeson," added Palliser. "Here we are, as you see, and here we shall be until our teeth drop out, and Bland is ready to go home in a bath-chair. I don't believe the bloody war is ever going to end."

Kennedy sat down on his chair and threw his cap on to his narrow bed. A sudden feeling of being hopelessly caged was upon him, and it caught him like the grip of hands. He asked all the usual questions, and now and then Compton turned and threw a few remarks at him, as though he were pelting him with stones. Every one was tired, although they had done so little during the day; but the awful monotony wore down the spirit of the party. The two Russians and two of the Frenchmen began to play cards, and Palliser wound up the gramophone, not that he really wanted to soften the soul of Bland with its music, but because he deliberately intended to rise Compton. He had been obliged to restrict himself to certain hours during which he could be musical, and he was still within the allotted time.

Kenny learnt what he could from Compton and de Beussent, while voices from the world they had all left sang about love and kisses, Compton listening, with his watch in an open palm.

"Now shut off that cursed row," he said, as the time expired, and Palliser made a face at his back.

It wasn't going to be very easy to live an ideal life in Room 24, but it was better, incomparably better than the *Lehrerseminar*; and the gramophone won

easily if you made it compete against the sounds which had become familiar to Kenny's ears. They were all doing their best, so far as they could, but Compton's temper had got to a chronic stage, and Bland's depression was never lifted, even when he felt that he was a hero. Palliser, with all his faults, was a godsend, and he told a succession of stories which would have made a Judge of the Police Courts blush. In the whole range of the prison barracks no one could equal him, but he had skill enough to draw a laugh; in fact, his accomplishment in this respect was a definite asset, and he was good-natured enough to display it when he, too, was feeling anything but gay.

"*Il faut rire quand même*," de Beussent said; and he thought "Pal" a *bon garçon*, for he invented rumours for the benefit of the others, and said he was having a desperate love-affair in dumb show with the *Kommandant's* fat daughter. When he put away the gramophone he flung himself on Kenny's bed, which he said, by the feel of it, was stuffed with copies of *Vorwärts*. Compton had returned to his writing once more, and Bland had subsided near the stove, staring before him and driven by his memories; de Beussent was reading the daily paper with which they were supplied, and so Palliser and Kennedy were as much alone as they were ever very likely to be.

"It's like being forced to take the vows of a Trappist," said Palliser, lighting a cigarette, "and I never formed that notion of passing the time, but I've got a good temper. How are you going to stand having to salute sergeants and all that sort of thing?"

"God knows," said Kenny absently. He was thinking of the last time he had seen Palliser, when some enthusiastic girl had kissed him, under the influence of the pink wave. The pink wave had washed them all a long way out into very dread waters, and he thought there was something wrong with Pal—he had the look of deterioration about him, and he took no trouble to

make his own space tidy. He seemed to have pitched on his clothes, and he shaved carelessly.

"My God," Palliser went on, "what wouldn't I give to be able to get out and get blind. It's this awful, sober, broad-daylight existence that plays hell with a man."

"I wonder how Rattray is?" said Bland. "He looked awfully bad, and I expect he is dying in that charnel-house out there." He shuddered and glanced over his shoulder, a trick he had got into, which he could not be induced to conquer.

"That's right, kid, make the best of everything," said Palliser, "that's the way to win the war."

"Does any one ever escape?" Kenny asked, his hands clasped behind his head, and his eyes on the flare of gas.

"Yes"—Palliser gave a crowing laugh—"two of our chaps, Dennison and Bates, but they went further than they'd bargained for. We knew about it, and we were sitting up in the dark simply sweating with funk. I liked Dennison as much as any man I ever knew, and then we heard a couple of rounds fired. Gad, Kenny, those shots fairly tightened one's heart, and they seemed to echo all through the night. I don't suppose they fired more than four, but it was like a fusillade—nerves, of course. They were buried in style. Our friend the *Kommandant* gave them a military funeral, and we made wreaths," he gave a curious laugh. "I made mine out of carrot tops and some of the leaves of the tree outside the window. It was the first time we got our noses outside the gates. . . ." Bland had moved restlessly, and Palliser rose on his arm and threw a pillow at him. "Now then, youngster," he said sharply, "what's the matter with you?"

Nothing unusual was the matter with Bland, and he said so, and turned his face so that it was hidden from the light.

"I can understand," went on Palliser, "why it is

that women are often such cats. They are boxed up in a house with each other, and they have to meet all day long. They have to pass each other on the stairs, and they don't ever go away and forget things. If I could go down into Crefeld and get blind at the nearest pub I could forgive the rifle-shots and that bloody man-hunt that did in Dennison—one of the decentest chaps God ever made.”

The evening meal was brought in, and Kenny took the place which had belonged to Rattray. Compton conducted things with as much ceremony as was possible, and that was very little; still, he did what he could, and he was able to exercise a fair show of control over his mixed assembly. It fell to Kenny's lot to sit beside de Beussent, and he found him easy to get on with, whether it was that he felt himself, in spite of all warnings, to be getting onwards somehow, or whether it was that the voice of de Beussent recalled memories, he could not have said; but the lines haunted him, as he talked idly enough to his neighbour.

*Et comme un air sonne au bois creux des guitares  
Tu fais chanter ton rêve au vide de mon cœur.*

His heart was empty enough in all conscience, and yet the sense and feeling that there was some kind of blind hope close to him, upheld him wonderfully. Palliser was sitting sprawling over the table just opposite, and facing the door.

“Our corporal has got his eye on you, Kennedy,” he said. “He's been dodging in and out half-a-dozen times, and each time I've caught him staring at you. He has studied you at every known angle by this time.”

“Let him,” said Kenny indifferently.

“He doesn't like the cut of your jib,” went on Palliser, “and he is imagining frightfulness in his heart.”



After their last meal was cleared away, they played bridge until lights out.

"I'm damned glad I'm not next door," said Palliser, "they've got Colonel Beeston there, and he prays aloud for half an hour. Poor little Tommy Scaife says that they can't get it stopped. He worries Lewiston who is a strong Catholic, and Spencer who is an Atheist, and then they all argue after lights out, so that no one gets to sleep before to-morrow morning. Infernally bad form, and I don't believe God likes it."

Kenny got to his bed at last, and lay awake for a long time looking at the stars in the sky outside his window. The stars were familiar, and they were friendly signs in the heavens. The earth around him had changed, and life had altered out of all possible recognition, but, overhead, the known lights were faithful and constant.

## CHAPTER XVI

**A**FTER a few weeks of prison routine Kennedy began to know every one in the *Husaren Kasernen*. Spring had come, and the little new leaves were budding out on the trees around the parade-ground, and the grizzly place began to take on a new aspect. Soft breezes blew fine white streamers of cloud over a blue sky, and the sparrows hunted about over the grass of the recreation ground for food. Swallows were building in the eaves under the shoots, and nothing could keep out the rising sense of life which filtered through ever to the lazarette and conjured up ghosts of men who struggled into the sunlight. The soul behind the tired eyes of the prisoners was beginning to look forth again, but there was no eagerness, no animation in it, and, at best, they were steadily patient. A little almond tree at the corner of the closed gates, covered with baby blossoms pink and white, made a patch of pale colour, and awoke deep sentimental dreams in the heart of Lieutenant Bland. Fresh batches of prisoners kept on arriving, and their reports were not encouraging. Every regiment had lost most of its numbers, and the new arrivals came in in rags. Kennedy had grown used to his own surroundings, but he could not grow used to captivity. In hospital there had been the stringent horror of necessity, but, now that he was well again, the awful publicity of his life became harder to bear. Compton's temper was growing worse instead of better, and at times he broke out into violent speech, lamenting the fact that he had not been killed, and scoring it up as another reason for antipathy against his late C.O.,

who had managed to get out of the muddle and had been mentioned in despatches.

The *Kommandant* was a burly man with a narrow head and dull eyes. He had, so Palliser, who got hold of all the gossip, discovered, been a failure in the field, and, because of this, he was permanently embittered and squared his account whenever it was possible by consistent rudeness to the men whom he had at his mercy. In his own private life he was disagreeable, and, though he could not be described as brutal, he made things worse for every one. When his tall, narrow-shouldered, wide-waisted, ill-made figure was discerned coming across the courtyard to inspect, it meant that he was out to satisfy his own desire to punish some one, and it required constant watchfulness on the part of the prisoners to keep from retort—retaliation being out of the question. He regarded them all as criminals, and he looked at the trembling ruins of men who sat outside the reserve lazarette, without a shred of pity for their condition. In fact, he would have liked all of them to have been reduced to the same desperate ebb of courage and vitality.

It was not long before he realized that there was a mutineer in the camp. Kenny's eyes gave him away, and his silence was a source of irritation. If he spoke, the *Kommandant* roared at him, and, if he kept silent, he threatened him with punishments. For a month he deprived him of his letters and prohibited his writing any mail home, and Kennedy only shrugged his shoulders and endured the penalty. He had never got into really bad disgrace, and was careful to give no cause, but the *Kommandant's* steady dislike boded no good. There seemed no present hope of escape, but Gleeson did not give up his cherished plan. Sooner or later he intended to take his chance, and, if the guard shot him—well, it would be a solution.

The corporal of the guard showed no sign of losing

his special rancour, and he always spoke to Kenny as though he was the one of the prisoners whom he regarded with a peculiar animosity, and yet he had a friend somewhere. Urlaub, always kindly, had said that he was very regretful, but orders were orders. He could not disobey, and yet, one night when Kennedy got into his narrow bed, he found a parcel under his pillow which, by the light of the round moon outside, he discovered to be his missing mail. It included a letter from Elodie, and he thanked his unknown friend with a depth of gratitude which gave him a queer choked feeling in the throat. Urlaub must have managed it, but he did not like to express his gratitude in words. The following day the corporal of the guard pushed him publicly with the butt of his rifle, and only Palliser's intervention prevented Kenny from catching the man by the throat and beating his head against the wall.

"What's the use of getting hung for killing a filthy skunk?" Palliser had argued. "Don't be a damned ass, Kenny; if Compton can keep from murder you ought to be able to stick it."

It was all hopelessly humiliating, but it had to be endured. One morning there were unusual signs of preparation in the barracks, and the *Kommandant* appeared in the square at an early hour. He wore his look of permanent affront against fate, more determinedly than usual, and he was jumpy and nervous, which made him bellow louder than was his wont.

The senior officer of the district, *Freiherr* Von Tahl, was coming to inspect, and the prisoners were divided into groups of various nationalities, the British to be the last.

Gathered together in a line they waited. Some of them had got new uniforms sent out from England, but the later comers were clothed in their war-soiled khaki.

“ ‘Some in rags and some in tags,’ ” Kennedy remarked to Palliser. “ By God, we do look an efficient lot.”

Among them there were men without caps, taken from them for souvenirs by the train guard, who had snatched them away to bring home as trophies. A few had greatcoats, to hide the fact that they were all but naked beneath the wrapping, and some were obliged to cover themselves with blankets. *Freiherr* Von Tahl was walking proudly along the line, followed by the *Kommandant*, and he spoke with a show of friendliness to the Frenchmen. The Russians he disposed of with a few nods of approval, and he stood a long time talking to the Belgians. It appeared that he had a good deal to say to them, and was inclined to make a pleasant impression. He asked if they were comfortable, and he saluted their senior officer with respect. Wheeling round, he walked on, and stood looking at the line of British officers, and then he broke into a low laugh.

“ Who are these tramps? ” he demanded. “ The French are fine soldiers, the Russians have a sense of dignity, and the Belgians are admirable, but these scarecrows——? ”

“ These are the British, ” said the *Kommandant* with a sneer.

“ What are you all doing in these clothes? ” he shouted, walking towards a Colonel of a well-known regiment. “ Your condition is disgraceful. ” And then he met Kenny’s eyes and glared at him furiously. He was dressed quite faultlessly, and his buttons shone, but there was that about him which exasperated Von Tahl.

“ Oh, we ”—Kennedy replied carelessly—“ we are the men who went from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves. It is due to that fact that you see us at a disadvantage. ”

Von Tahl stiffened his back and his face grew

dangerous. "Then you imply that our soldiers are robbers?"

"I hardly implied it," Kenny said in level tones. "Everything was stolen from us."

They measured each other with a steady stare, and Von Tahl turned to Compton.

"You appear to be incapable of exercising any discipline," he said. "Is this officer in your room?"

Compton replied that he was.

"I shall consider what penalty will be necessary," said the *Freiherr* as he turned away.

The inspection was concluded, and the prisoners free to return to their quarters.

"You are damned unlucky," Palliser remarked as they went back to Room 24. "No German can bear to see a fellow hold himself the way you do. Try a stoop, or learn to squint, old thing; limp, wear your clothes as if they were a sack, the way I do; only, for God's sake, get rid of that defiance. It will make trouble for you before you've done."

Kennedy sat down at his table and began to write. He was writing to Elodie, and it was very hard to know what to say.

"I got the box of soap and the cigarettes," he wrote. "You can't imagine what it meant to wash with a large block of verbenä. I had two inches of cold water, and my neck is perfectly clean. We are quite a cheerful lot here in Room 24—I wish you could see us." He stopped for a moment and looked at the little flutter of green silk leaves in the tree beyond the window. "I suppose that imprisonment gives one a special zest for little things. We all arrange what we will do when we come back. Compton is going home, of course. He has a wife and two children. I saw her photograph, and I don't know that I envy either of them very much. She has a narrow chest and a dull eye, and they live in Devonshire. Bland, our poet, is going to get married to a girl called Dolly, and he

won't soldier any more; we think they ought to make him Laureate. Palliser is going to buy twenty bottles of bath salts and empty them all into one bath and stay in it for a month; after that, he intends to go round London, having a drink at every pub from one end to the other, and then he says he doesn't care if he bursts. I haven't told any one what I am going to do, because it is a secret, but I have my plan. Tell me about what you are doing yourself, and is there any news of Teddy? I want to know everything. I feel as if there should be heaps of things for me to tell you, but one wanders off, and I wish we were back under the fir trees in the little gap over the Blackwater. It was nice there, wasn't it? Do you remember how you came there through the wood that afternoon years and years and years ago—or was it yesterday? Hil tells me that Larry has gone and will soon be in France." He stopped again and thought. It was like writing from another life, and they had no idea—— Better so, what would be the use if they did know? He wrote on quickly.

"Palliser is having a love affair, or so he tells us. He says that the *Kommandant's* daughter, Erna, opens her windows and signals to him every day. I don't know anything about her except that her clothes are dried on a line in the back garden of their house which adjoins the Barracks, and they aren't attractive."

He hastily put his pen through this line. Palliser's jokes had a way of cropping up unexpectedly, and he had made a number of jests concerning the lingerie of *Fräulein* Erna.

"We expect to get up a football team soon," he continued, "and now when we walk out during the day we are very much admired by the crowd who come to the Barrack gate and sing us 'Rule Britannia.' Sometimes I ask myself why we are all here when there are so many other places we could be? Every now and then a devil comes and inhabits me, so Palliser has it,

and I do feel the limitations. You asked me to answer your questions about that. In the other blocks there are a lot of fellows I know. Tresser, who played for Kent; Strickland, who was at Eton with me; Westerton, who ought to be sitting in the House of Lords, and little Bryce, who coxed the Oxford crew in '13. My greatest foe here is the corporal of the guard, a boshy, toshy creature, who has taken a most vigorous dislike to me. Our head jailer is a good chap—but all this is to talk of shadows. We all have to live a life of pretence, on the surface, and, behind it, every one of us is busy spinning pictures. I have hung all my walls with one special one, which I will tell you about when I get back to you.” He crossed out the “you” and wrote “England” instead, and lighted a cigarette.

Palliser was asleep, and the Russians were also snoring loudly, the French officers had been permitted to go under guard to the town to get some commissions, a rare treat, and Compton had gone to the dentist; so the room was comparatively empty. Bland hardly counted, for he never spoke unless some one addressed him by name, and he sat looking out of the window. How long was it going to last, Kenny wondered, this soul-starving process? It was surely enough to make devils weep. Nothing to be had which the heart craved for; flowers, open country, the decencies of ordinary life; they were cut off from it all. No one actually spoke of their longings, or how they craved to hear the voices of women, and for the surroundings of home. If it really were to go on interminably, how could he or any of them hope to keep a vestige of reason and normal feeling alive? If it could be done it would be a triumph of the great human spirit, but, even before his eyes, he could see that, for nearly all of them, the change might come too late. Bland, in his helpless posture of idleness, was tragedy incarnate; he had lived through eternities in



the time, and he was tired of verse-making. He hardly roused himself now to write to Dolly, whose letters were short and unsatisfactory. Rattray, had been buried in the prison churchyard, and a frenzy of feeling against fate worked in the mind of Gleeson. The dull aching of so many hearts was clear to him, and, outside the walls, the trees were all bursting into blossom in their freedom; the little birds sang loudly in the light of the afternoon sun, and people came and went, and, if they thought of the prisoners at all, it was to stop and jeer at them. The torture was so long drawn, and the world cared nothing. At home they got on all right, and went about listening to music and talk and laughter; he thanked God it was so, even though the contrast was a bitter one; and soldiers, and officials and men who were making their fortunes out of the war, walked the streets and went on just the same.

Poor, gentle Bland; he still heard regularly from his mother, but Dolly had ceased to be one of George Palliser's jokes; they all knew that she must have found consolation somewhere a little closer to hand. As for himself, Hilda wrote, and she never failed, and Elodie wrote quite constantly, but they were under difficulties, they did not know what to say. Larry, of course, never put pen to paper, and the news of him was that he was in France and getting on well. Men friends never did write to each other, and, after nearly a year had been spent apart, you had the empty consolation of knowing exactly who really bothered about you, one way or the other. Tresser had six sisters, a fact he had never before actually regarded as a blessing, but now his mails were the envy of the whole Camp.

All these thoughts, and many others, came fitfully to the mind of Kennedy Gleeson as the hours drifted by. There was nothing special to do in any hour, and he finished off his letter.

"I can't tell you what a real kindness it is to write. Mail days abroad used to be an event, and I used to send my coolies over a hundred miles to get the post, but mail day here—there aren't any words to express what it stands for, or the feelings of the man who only gets a bill forwarded through his bankers. All the same, we are cheery enough."

He folded it up and addressed it. There was so much pleasure in writing the address, as it seemed to link things up more definitely, and then Kenny recollected that he had a rather one-sided row with *Freiherr* Von Tahl, and he wondered if he really was to receive chastisement. Every now and then men who were driven into revolt lost their heads and their tempers, and were given solitary confinement. If he were to share their fate it would at least mean that he could be really alone, and he hardly objected to the prospect.

Inside the square comfortable house of the *Kommandant* the *Freiherr* had been dining well. The room was warm and the windows were closed, even though the day was fine. *Freiherr* Von Tahl had eaten uncooked ham and large quantities of pickles, and he sat with his belt and any buttons that restrained his waist, open, and discussed Kennedy Gleeson with the *Kommandant*.

"He needs a sharp lesson," he said; for the more he had thought it over, the more his sense of outraged dignity swelled and grew, and he gave the *Kommandant* an angry look.

"It appears strange that in your Camp prisoners are permitted to be insolent."

The *Kommandant* made a grumbling reply. He was a soldier, not a *Gerichtsdienner*, but he quite agreed that the Lieutenant should be made to learn some Kultur. He had always hated the English. What did the *Freiherr* suggest? Usually the punishment

for insubordination was detention of varying length in the cells.

"*Ach*, that is childish," said Von Tahl rudely. "As well put him in the corner with a dunce's cap on his head. I have a better suggestion. Let him be sent to the men's prison camp for fourteen days, and see how his pride will survive the experience. I have known men return after such a time so altered that there was no more trouble."

The *Kommandant* looked scared. He did not like the idea in the least.

"There should be a Court Martial," he objected. "If the Americans get to hear of it they will make trouble. As it is they are quite troublesome enough."

"If I give the order it is sufficient," Von Tahl replied shortly. "Let him be removed there to-night."

The room was really comfortable, and Von Tahl had appreciated his host's wine, and, by the time the order was given, he was dozing peacefully in his chair. He had settled his grudge, and it was not likely that Lieutenant Gleeson would ever again make witty quotations from the Bible. He would be utterly humiliated, and the men whose quarters he was to share would resent his appearance among them. In every way it might be regarded as a clever and spirited piece of retaliation.

The *Kommandant*, who was inwardly suffering from his guest's interference and his manners, went off to give the necessary order, and was informed that an armed guard from the *Kriegesgefangenen Lager* would come at sunset to remove the Herr Lieutenant Gleeson, and that for a fortnight Room 24 would be minus one occupant.

Urlaub said nothing, it was not his place to criticize the proceedings which German High Headquarters considered fitting, but he confided the news to the corporal of the guard.

"Here now, Karl, you hate this English officer, so

you will sleep well to-night. He is to be sent to the lice and rats of the common Lager because he has insulted that *Gott Allmächtig*, Von Tahl.

The pallid-faced corporal stared and dropped the rifle which he was cleaning.

"*Gut*," he said at last in a husky voice. "May they eat him. We do not want him here."

Urlaub puffed at his big pipe and shook his head.

"Of all my gentlemen I like him the best. I would do anything I could for him except aid him to escape. From the first day he came here have I liked him, Karl."

The corporal muttered that he knew better. Had he not been a waiter in that accursed England, and he had suffered many indignities during his stay there.

Urlaub felt that he had no specific arguments to offer, so he lurched away, but he was sad all the rest of the evening. At six o'clock a guard with fixed bayonets came up the stairs and along the corridor to Room 24, and, to the astonishment of the party, Kenny was dragged out and pushed through the door. George Palliser's usually rubicund face grew pale, and Bland stood shaking, clasping and unclasping his long, fine hands like an agitated girl.

It was vain for Compton to shout at them, and for the French officers to try and understand something of what was in progress; even the Russians added to the disorder, and Kenny himself quelled it.

"Where am I going?" he asked, and he laughed. "Is it a Guard of Honour that you are providing?"

"You are going to the men's Lager," roared the sergeant, and he rounded up his remarks with a volley of filthy abuse.

Kennedy saluted Compton and nodded a good-bye to the rest.

"Change of air, at least," he said, as he was taken out of the room, and, only when the door had closed, did he realize how much one could feel leaving the

crowded place with its quarrels and its kindliness and all the comradeship which had come into being while he was there. The future was stormy, and even the weather was pitiless, as it began to rain heavily, and Kenny, who had no greatcoat with him, was marched through the torrents of rain to his new quarters.

There was no use making a fuss, and whatever had to be borne would have to be borne. If you have to bear things there really is only one way in which it can be done, and that is, with a touch of the old feeling that belonged to the saints and martyrs. Kennedy certainly did not regard himself as a saint, and he was not preoccupied with the notion of being a martyr, he was just carrying on as best he could. There was the memory of the journey in the cattle-truck, the months at the *Lehrerseminar*, and then the comparative peace and comfort of Room 24—it actually appeared like a warm, friendly star, gleaming through a night of darkness, as one looked back at it from the gate in the wires that encircled his next resting-place. There was nothing encouraging about the outside of it, and the smell of something heavy and nauseating floated everywhere, composed of decaying vegetables and other vile compounds. He remembered that Palliser argued that if you acquired a taste for bad smells it would remain with you, and that he expected to be discovered with his nose to the nearest sewer for years after his return to England.

## CHAPTER XVII

CERTAINLY his removal to the common Camp was a change. Kennedy found himself an inmate of a town formed of wooden huts covered with tarred paper, all exactly alike and all looking in the same direction, set down in rows upon a plain of mud or dust, as the season decided. They were not unlike slag-heaps, these unholy-looking dwellings, and around them were lines and lines of barbed wire, forming a fence twenty feet high. Some little touch of mercy was shown to the awful blankness by the creepers which twined around the posts, and which here and there made attempts to cover the huts themselves.

Behind the wire strands it was possible to see things at a great distance off, and everything was fearfully distant to the men who walked so listlessly inside. No one ever came near them except armed sentries accompanied by ferocious dogs, and the threat of machine-guns ready and waiting for the man who dared to attempt to escape, was a silent and continuous menace. Each division of the camp contained a group of fifteen hundred men, who were a source of interest to the passers along the main road to Crefeld. They called the place the "*Tiergarten*," and the young girls in gay clothes occasionally brought opera-glasses so that they might be able to study conditions more critically, and explain them to their little brothers or their elderly and respectable looking parents, who made their Sunday walk along the Feld Strasse. There were eight groups in the camp, and into each of the black huts two hundred and fifty men were packed. In theory the place

was perfect; there were guard-houses, kitchens, a bath-house, wash-houses, and a small hospital, also gas; but the woodwork had warped and the roofs let in the rain; there was next to nothing cooked in the kitchens; and dirt and destruction held full sway. Men were dying slowly of hunger inside the wires, and the floors of the huts, covered with verminous mattresses, were crowded with men. Each hut should have held forty, and there were over two hundred to a room. Damp ate into everything, and a persistent drip from the roof fell day and night on the bedding and blankets. Even the blankets were a make-believe and were composed of flannelette, which soon wore into holes and tatters, and absorbed the moisture into its flimsy substance. Strings, stretched from one side to the other of the dingy interior, were hung with ragged garments, and the smell of dirt was overpowering. There were no dining-tables, so food had to be eaten on the filthy floor, and a bowl and a spoon were the only utensils obtainable. Some one had thought that if the prisoners had knives they might have attacked their guards, so they were "*verboden*."

The wash-houses were all out of order, so the sole supply of water for washing was a noisome little stream which struggled through the camp; it contained refuse, sewage, and filth of all kinds, but all day long men washed themselves and their shirts in it to try and destroy the lice which gathered thickly in every seam, and which made life sickeningly unendurable. The company inside comprised every description of soldier. Territorials from conquered towns, Zouaves, men wearing the flat caps of the Alpine troops, and men in turbans and Tunisian caps; Scotch, Irish, English, and native Africans, wrapped in their burnous, Southern Indians and Punjabis. Food was distributed at 6 A.M., 12 o'clock, and 6 P.M., and everything reeked and stank. Soup was made of potato skins and swedes, and formed the mid-day

dinner, and at 6 A. M. and P. M. alike a dubious liquid was dished out, which was given the name of coffee.

Kennedy's first introduction into his new quarters was in the dark, and he felt his way to a ledge which ran under the window. It was too narrow to sleep on, and so no one used it, but it was possible to sit there and doze at intervals through the night.

Soon after daybreak the room woke up, and Kennedy gazed with sheer horror at the sight before him. The prisoners all slept herded in pell-mell, and they looked like frightened refugees crowded together in the hold of a ship. The air was unbreathably thick, and, amid all this, the German guard came in shouting "*Aus! Aus!*" and forcing the men along with kicks. It was time for roll-call, and Kennedy took his place with the rest in the middle of the muddy square. There they were kept for an hour while the German non-commissioned officers counted them at their leisure. After that there was coffee, and they could wander about the wretched enclosure.

Kennedy stood looking around him. Everywhere there were lean, hungry men in rags, and many of them wore the tattered remains of khaki tunics. Wisps of their shirts came out through rents in sleeves and trousers, and there were white, wasted faces and hollow eyes looking at him, as though a world of ghosts stood peering towards him. Many of the men were hatless, or had made themselves caps out of linings of their pockets, and they wore heavy sabots stuffed with straw, dragging their feet after them with utter weariness. He walked up to a group of men standing at the door of the canteen and spoke to them; this canteen was used by the guard as a smoking-room, and there they drank beer and sang songs.

"Who are you?" Kennedy asked, speaking to a tall man with strands of black hair falling over his face.



"First Life Guards, sir," he replied, drawing himself together and saluting. "I don't look like it, I know."

Gleeson's face grew nearly as white as that of the man whom he spoke to. This hell where he now was had turned men into living scarecrows, hopeless, helpless, and friendless.

The man cast down his eyes and began to scratch his arms methodically.

"We're all pretty nearly done," he said in his spiritless voice; another, dragging a crippled leg behind him, joined them.

"I'm sorry to see you here, sir," he said; "this place is alive with infection. There were two typhus cases in our hut yesterday. They have been taken to the hospital. Neither had had a change of clothes since they got into camp, and I suppose they'll lie and rot without as much as a sheet to cover them, until they peg out."

As they talked, and Kennedy gave them a handful of cigarettes, one of the guard came forward, and, taking him by the shoulder, flung him roughly aside. He shouted that he had orders that Gleeson was to be watched, and not allowed to work up riots among the prisoners.

"Riots, my God," Kenny said, as he stood panting and shaking with rage, "I'd give my life to have a Mills bomb handy."

During the time he was in the common Camp Kennedy lived on the men's food and drank the water which tasted of living death. Afterwards, he said that he thought that anger must be a stimulant, for, though he went hungry, and in a little time he was attacked by the vermin which lived in the mattress upon which he slept, his own health did not suffer. He had the experience of the *Lehrerseminar* behind him, and he had been in the *Husaren Kasernen*, but, until he came to the common Camp, he had still not realized

what a wonderful thing human nature can arise and be. At first he was avoided by his fellow-prisoners. He was clean and not starved; they were hopelessly dirty and had been hungry for months; but, after a time, the distance between them was bridged over. In vain the sentries threatened the men who came and talked to him, for he was forbidden to speak to the rest, but in the end this rule was relaxed. Every conceivable indignity which could be devised was heaped upon Kennedy Gleeson. He was given the most menial fatigues to carry out, and the attempt to humiliate him in the eyes of the men was organized with a thoroughness which even became amusing. In the middle of all the misery the long-delayed parcels of food and clothing began to come from England, and Kenny presided at the first real meal which they had had since the date of their sad captivity.

He did not know how long he was to be kept in the Lager, and he was allowed neither parcels nor letters, nor was he permitted to communicate with the outside world.

"I believe I'm a fixture," he said to Abdy, the Guardsman, as he sat mending a tear in his coat. "There's no reason why they should ever let me out again, I suppose."

"Four of our hut have gone to the post this morning," Abdy said; he was cleaning Kennedy's boots, a job which he performed every morning; "they get hours of it now. I had two to begin with, but they have extended the time to five."

"Pretty bloody," Kennedy said, and looked at his handiwork; he had no idea that he could sew so neatly.

"At first they put the fellows near enough for us to hear them shout for water and to have the ropes loosened, but some one objected. I believe the people on the roads didn't like it, so now they march them two miles out."

Kennedy listened as he began work on the torn lining of a pocket. Abdy did not tell his stories with any heat or feeling, he merely recounted them as any one might talk of the doings of a day, and the whole record of merciless tyranny and deep and ever deeper depths of vileness was exposed slowly. After a time Kennedy broke off his thread.

"How have you stood it and kept sane and decent?" he asked. "My God, it's enough to make a world of lunatics."

"There are a good few of those, sir, from time to time," Abdy replied; "they put the shock cases with the madmen, and that does the trick . . ." and then more details, told in the same low, steady voice, until Kennedy felt his flesh creep.

Oh, the stories he heard. There was much talk of war and battles, and the wounded men spoke of atrocities they had witnessed. The Belgians spoke of the horrors of the invasion of their own country, and there was an English-speaking Russian who always told the same story. His brother had been crucified, and crucifixion is a slow death, and, under his agonized eyes, he had seen his wife violated by his captors and then stabbed to death with bayonets. "So they crucified Sergius," he said in conclusion. Henri, a *Poilu*, had found two corpses of violated women in the field outside his own house, and, with these, there were the stories of mutilated children.

"We are nothing now," Henri said in his wonderful Gascon voice; "we cannot advance and march carrying a bayonet along the roads of France—we are animals in a cage."

At the end of the fourteenth day Kennedy was on the lookout for some possible change. He knew that the usual term of punishment was a fortnight, and he longed to be back in Room 24, as once he had longed to be home. Anyhow one got away from the heaviest

weight of it all in the *Husaren Kasernen*, and, from the common Lager there was not the remotest chance to escape. His mind was still fixed upon the one thought, and he had considered whether Urlaub was likely to be approachable, or whether he could manage an interview with the dentist and get away through the house somehow. It all looked equally impossible without an ally, and he was not at all sure that Urlaub could be induced to shut one eye and then face the results, when so unpopular a prisoner was found to have escaped. He lived on the thought and the hope of escape; it seemed to Kenny that if he stayed much longer every shred of his old self would have given place to a stone-hard, rancorous man, who wanted to set fire to *Mittel Europa* and watch the blaze. Men, women, and children might burn in it for aught he would care, so he told himself, and at times he began to fear that he was falling under the deadly spiritual plague which infected the mind. You could heal the body and get used to the sight of the scars, but, if he once became like his captors in mentality, he must admit himself conquered.

He was wandering about, watching the road, and wondering if his release was coming, when at last he saw a closed fly bundling along the horizon, and, after a time, he felt that he might let himself fancy that it was to take him away. How the beastly thing crawled; the horse was in wretched condition, and the harness gave way; and, just as the fly came to the turn in the road which would decide its destination, the driver had to clamber down and go through a long process of repair. Kennedy cursed him with savage violence, and felt the futility of it all madden him. At length the harness was mended, and the fly came onwards with a heavy swing. There was no doubt now that it was heading towards the prison Lager, and Kenny began to feel electric thrills coursing up and down his spine. To be as glad as all this to go back

to Room 24! What miracles may be performed by circumstance!

At last the fly drew up before the sentry-post, and Kennedy saw his old and bitter enemy, the pallid corporal, climb out. He looked just as surly and sulky as ever, and he stood talking to the guard and showed an official paper. The man on guard turned his head and spat in the direction of Kennedy, to indicate that he was still there, and then the corporal shouted rudely to him to come at once.

"You are to return to the *Husaren Kasernen*," he said, "and the *Herr Kommandant* says that you are first to be disinfected and washed. Since his house is near he does not wish that there be any outbreak."

"That is very kind and considerate of him," said Kenny. "But you must wait. I want to say good-bye to my friends."

He returned to the shed and the wretched little room where he had come to know so many wonderful and fine things. His comrades had been humble and poor, they had lacked everything that makes life wholesome or clean, but, in spite of all this, they had filled him with respect and burning admiration. As he parted from Abdy and all the rest he could say nothing of all he felt. There was his bed, raised from the lice-runs on the floor on a plank stolen by Burke, a boy from Cork who always addressed him as "Master Kennedy," at considerable risk, just to make his lot better; there was a bit of curtain hung up, and dragged down each day by the guard, to give him a shred of privacy, and all this out of their utter poverty and emptiness. They were glad for him that he was going, and Abdy, now clothed in his own uniform and proud of himself again, walked with Gleeson to the place where the guard and the corporal were standing. The corporal advanced with his rifle raised.

"You have been too long," he said in his bullying

way. "Come on." And then he glanced at Abdy, and hurried off as though to save his dignity.

Kennedy turned round and looked back at the desolation he was leaving. It was something to know that now the parcels had begun to arrive things were better than when he had first come there, but, even so—even so—he thought of Henri, the *Poilu*—"We are only animals in a cage," and yet, how wonderful they were. He got into the fly and the corporal shouted to the driver, got in, closed the doors and pulled down the blinds.

"Why am I to travel in darkness?" Kennedy asked, and then he felt two hands grip his own. For a moment he thought the man intended to kill him, and then he heard a broken voice, speaking in tones hardly above a whisper:

"*Mein Herr, mein Herr*, you have forgotten me, but I ever remember you. *Ach, Gott*—I have to play this part because it is best. Later on I will explain. . . ."

## CHAPTER XVIII

**S**IR JAMES MONROE HARRINGTON died in the second year of the war and left his large estates to his son. No one really regretted his departure in the least. Lady Gertrude was wrapped up in Teddy and her thoughts were always in France, and Teddy had never cared much for his father, who was a tiresome talker and very easily offended. He was perpetually on the defensive, and he carried his sense of dignity like an overfull teacup—almost any one could upset it. He died during a Push, so even the obituary notices were curtailed to a few lines, which would have affronted him, had he known. The major result of his death was a sudden activity on the part of Lady Gertrude, who wanted Teddy to expedite the arrangements for his marriage.

He came home on a fairly extended leave, and, after the funeral, arrived in London with time on his hands. Elodie and Hilda Grove had taken a small flat together in Knightsbridge, and both of them were working in a Government Office, where Elodie brought her wonderful touch of wild woods and springtime, and was like a green bough in a dusty house. Hilda liked the new experience of work, and soon began to understand that she had special gifts. She could manage the women wonderfully, and she never lost her temper on the longest and hottest day. Mr. Walrond, under whom she worked, thought her wonderful, and she soon presided over a room where twenty girls of different ages made mistakes from 9 A.M. to 6.30 P.M.

The flat had belonged to an extravagant young man with unimpeachable taste, and there Hilda and Elodie talked together in the evenings, and both felt

the odd, lonely joy of independence. Hil wrote her daily letter to Larry, and tried to tell him about the new adventure, and Elodie hardly ever wrote at all, except for a weekly account of her doings which she posted to Crefeld. There was a certain resemblance between existing conditions for both of them, for the passing of the old order of things had taken them to the edge of a gulf across which neither of them could see very clearly.

So far as Hil and Elodie were concerned, they had a complete understanding of each other, and Hil, to whom everybody confided their troubles, knew that Elodie loved her brother.

The situation was beset by small difficulties, all of which she could appreciate, and, though in normal times the breaking off of an engagement was a simple affair for any sensibly minded people, Elodie's freedom of action was limited by the fact that Teddy went in constant danger of his life. She hesitated, and then compromised again and again. Her occasional letters to Teddy were written reluctantly, and she kept to commonplace statements. Nominally they were engaged, but there was nothing more than the name of it, and her soul gave her little squirms and shivers when her friends sympathized with her, or offered her congratulations. As soon as the war was over she intended to break the fiction to pieces, but, until then, she regarded it in the light of a duty just to go on.

It was when Lady Gertrude began the matrimonial campaign that Elodie grew depressed and anxious, and sat with her head against a cushion, a prey to discomfort.

"I've had another letter, Hil," she said. "Teddy's mother writes me things like leading articles, and she says that I ought to go to Glenfallow this autumn. The miners would like it. I can't see what they have got to say to it, but she makes them part of the argument."



"Don't let them force you," Hil said anxiously. She had brought back a bundle of papers from the Ministry and was working at them, sitting at a writing-table near the open window.

"It isn't force," Elodie objected, "it's far worse than that; its persuasion. I'm being led to water. Teddy arrives to-night, and he is to state the case. Oh, Hil, they want actually to arrange this wretched wedding at once."

Hilda pushed her papers away and came over to Elodie.

"You will have to be firm," she said, with her quick, sideways smile. "I can see how difficult Mamma is likely to be, but Teddy isn't really a bad sort at all. I should send Lady Gertrude a post card, and have it out with Teddy. After all, they have no business to try and push you along like this. If they do you must fight."

"I wish I knew how Kenny really is," she said after a pause. "One gets his letters, but, Hil, it's six weeks now since I heard anything. Kingsway told me, when I met him accidentally yesterday, that there were awful stories of what is going on in Germany. It makes me wretched."

"Patience," said Hil, who was always a daughter of consolation. She had her own difficulties of which she never spoke, and, though Kenny was set at a vast and aching distance, Larry was hardly much nearer. Larry and the "Bat" together, seemed nearly as strange as anything that could happen, even in war.

"I daresay you are right," Elodie went on, "Teddy may be much more reasonable. He has never really made much fuss about delays, and he knows quite well that I don't care——" she broke off and fiddled with her chain. "Oh, I wish I could get a letter," she added inconsequently.

"There's no use putting on one's boots and hat and going out to meet trouble," Hilda said, just touching

Elodie's wonderful crimped hair with a fleeting finger. "You'll get a whole pile together. It's a week now since I heard from Larry."

"He isn't a prisoner," Elodie stared before her, "and you and he are married. You had some happiness, Hil, and war swooped down on me before I could begin to live. I don't want to grumble, dear thing, but I envy you often."

Hilda looked down and said nothing. She had certainly had her happiness, and she was not sure that the going away of it had not left a more dreadful blank than the negative state in which Elodie wandered uncomforted. She knew the poignancy of absence, day and night, and the severance of the united ideal which had cut the strands across like a knife. Her interest in her own work was developing powers in her which could be of no use later on when peace came, and yet she was dimly aware that she, too, would miss the routine, the exercise of authority, which, sterile as it was, her life now provided her with. She and Larry had been plunged into the forcing-frame, away from Adrigole, and, in the fulness of time, they must go back there once more . . . she thought of it very often.

"I'd break it off," she said suddenly. "It's never really worth while trying to save people's feelings, El; it's much the same as a cat playing with a mouse which it fully intends to kill eventually. Be brutal, and get it off your chest."

"And then if anything happened to Teddy I should feel as if it was my fault," Elodie said. "It wouldn't be my fault, but there's the feeling."

"I'm not sure." Hil sat down on a cushion on the floor, "I think Teddy is well able to take jolly good care of himself, and no one could hold you responsible for where or how a bomb might fall. In any case, the Staff aren't nearly as badly off as the others. You've let yourself grow obsessed by this sentimental notion."

She looked up at Elodie's changing face and wondered how she could help her. "Teddy won't break his heart. I don't believe it's made of anything but India-rubber. After all, he has lots and lots of money, and half the girls in England want to marry him."

Elodie got up and stretched her arms wearily.

"If he would only find some one else. I thought that he had once, but he denied it."

"He would." Hilda laughed. "I believe that it would be very good for him to have a bad time. If you tell him when he comes that you have decided what to do, he would begin to readjust his point of view. As for his mother, let her find another eligible fiancée, it will keep her employed during the winter."

In the evening Teddy himself was to come round, according to the letter from Lady Gertrude, and Elodie, clad in a dress of pale shadow lace, and wearing her jade ornaments, looked very tense and ghostly as she sat opposite to Hilda during dinner.

"You shouldn't have made yourself look so nice," Hil said reprovingly; "I ought to have lent you my old rags to wear. I don't call it fair."

"I am going to finish it," Elodie said, and she smiled. "I know it's the only thing to do; and then we need never waste time talking of it again, Hil. I'm so sick of talking of it, and yet there it is, one can't get away from the subject."

There did, indeed, seem to be the necessity to discuss the wretched question, and the fact that the forthcoming marriage had been openly alluded to in a daily paper appeared to make the moment for action all the more compelling.

Once it was done Elodie felt that she could write to Kennedy at last, as she had longed and longed to write. He filled her thoughts to the exclusion of everything else, and that afternoon she had crossed the border between decision and indecision. To have made up her mind definitely was, in itself, a relief,

and she sat playing to Hilda after dinner, looking less troubled than she had been for weeks.

At ten o'clock Hilda looked up.

"Teddy is late," she remarked.

"He is sure to come," Elodie replied, and her fingers struck a light chord. "It is always the man you don't want who invariably does turn up. You know Teddy's way, he thinks that one can sit up all night if he doesn't want to go home."

After a time Hilda folded up her papers.

"Well, I'm off," she said, looking at the clock, "I can't wait any longer. In any case, it isn't me he is coming to see."

She kissed the back of Elodie's head and went off to her own room, and as she went she wondered what in the world it was which was keeping Sir Frederick Monroe Harrington and making him late for his appointment. Such things were difficult to understand, but, she considered, as she took out her hairpins, now everything was changed. Men were as independent as women, it appeared, and they did not trouble themselves. Yet, if it had been Kenny, he would have come. What a blessing it was, after all, that Elodie was only waiting up to tell Teddy that she was going to break off the cynical understanding between them. She opened the door once or twice and listened. Teddy had a high and carrying voice, and, if he was in the flat, he would certainly have arrived with a laugh which no walls could contain. But each time silence brooded without.

Elodie had ceased to play, but there was a light under the drawing-room door. She was giving him up to the last minute. Perhaps the telephone bell would ring and some explanation be made, but the telephone was in the little hall and Hil was sure to hear it if it did whirr its imperative summons into the soundlessness around. It was altogether very inexplicable, and Hil, who had come to understand all

kinds of fears, began to wonder if anything had really happened. Every day in the papers one read of accidents, murders, disappearances, and, though they never seemed to happen to any one one knew, there was no rule by which one might feel safe and certain that it could not be so. She even began to recall the things which she liked about Teddy, and numbers of times when he had been very kind and friendly towards her. He used to give her a present every Christmas—some expensive, useless thing which pleased her, and he had sent her a bit of shell from France. All these things returned to her as she got into bed and clicked off the light, and by that time she would have given almost anything to have heard Teddy's loudly expressed greeting, even if it awoke her from her sleep; she felt anxious, because it was certainly unusual and incomprehensible.

Elodie, left alone in the drawing-room, got up from the piano and sat down in Hilda's chair. She was thinking out what she intended to tell Teddy, and going over the arguments he was likely to use. He had written her a letter, quite brief and sensible in so far as it was devoid of passionate appeal, saying that he felt, under the altered circumstances, that it would be better to "pull the thing off." There was Glenfallow empty now, as his mother had decided to come back to London, and if Hil established herself there she would be able to get used to the place and the people, and it was to be her home. She would be near Lord and Lady Almwroth and would know "everybody." He had added that he himself thought the plan excellent, and that she had led him rather a wild-goose chase.

"As for not caring enough, that will be all right. People who begin in raptures usually end in the Admiralty Courts. I don't see any argument against it."

He told her he would come round the evening he

arrived in London to "fix things up," and he said that he was awfully glad that Hil was with her.

Elodie had never really considered Teddy's feelings very carefully. He had sometimes been ardent in his courtship, and at other times he left her alone, which state she infinitely preferred, but she believed that he meant what he said and that he loved her. She was still very much of a girl in her outlook, and she was entirely straightforward. For her to convict any one of duplicity or lack of her own sense of honour was nearly impossible, and she looked up at the clock and wondered why it was that Teddy was so amazingly late. He was always unpunctual, but to-night he was outdoing all former records. At length she, too, got up, and, sitting at the writing-table, she began her letter to Kenny. After a little she forgot to listen any longer, and her eyes changed as she bent over the closely covered pages.

If Teddy had come, by this time she would be free to write what she chose, and as he had not come, she was writing the letter which had been in her heart for months. She thought of Kenny in the close, crowded room, with people always at his elbow, and she contrasted it with her own privacy. A delicate light fell from a shaded lamp, and there was the scent of many flowers in the air. Some, and the idea was distasteful, came from the Glenfallow conservatories, but most of the blossoms were from her own home, and in one vase there was a cluster of roses from a bush which grew in the garden at Castle Glenfield.

The longing for Kennedy throbbed and thrilled through her, and she walked to the window and looked out at the steady moonlight which fell over the roofs and houses beyond. The streets were almost empty, and, as the flat was high up in the block, the people on the pavement looked very small and unreal. Space became a terrible thing to Elodie as she thought of the endless measures of it everywhere. She and Kenny

were both in the same world, but they were so limitlessly divided. He might be suffering anything, and she thought uneasily of Lord Kingsway's allusions of the morning; he might be crying her name to the skies, and she could not hear or answer.

She began to tremble suddenly, and nameless fears crowded upon her. It was not death, but it was like death. You could not lift the curtain and see for a second what was going on behind that impenetrable silence. She thought of herself as a fool who was playing with this silly contract, as if such things could really matter in so big a world as this. She wanted to run out into the night and start on a journey which would bring her to Kennedy, and, though it was hopelessly fantastic to indulge in such thoughts, she cherished it fondly.

A clock in a church nearby struck midnight, and the low, clear sounds recalled her to earth again.

Teddy was certainly not coming to-night, so she closed the window, turned off the lights, and went to bed. But, unlike Hil, she was not the least preoccupied with wondering what had happened to him—for she never gave him another thought.

## CHAPTER XIX

**T**EDDY HARRINGTON never for a moment disputed the fact that he intended to settle down, and that Elodie was the only girl he knew with whom he could face the prospect. He admired her most genuinely, and he respected her, though, as a rule, he avoided the society of women for whom he felt this special, cold-water sentiment. She was so undeniably delightful to look at, and though he never made the smallest effort to try and understand her, he felt that she was specially suitable.

Now that Glenfallow and the tracts of coal-fields which spread over half the country were his, he listened to Lady Gertrude's many and persuasive arguments, and agreed with her that the time had come. He had the assurance of wealth, and he felt that he would soon have done sufficient soldiering in France to suffice, so that it would make it all very pleasant if he were able to arrive on leave and be master in his own house. He played with the idea during the oppressing days when Sir James still lay upstairs on a bed, having at last achieved a condition of dignity which neither time nor chance would ever again disturb. Elodie was already very well known in the county, and he looked forward to unlimited security and peace.

As a matter of fact, Teddy was really rather tired, and the gloom of the house, combined with the amount of crape his mother wore on her clothes, cast a shadow over his shallow soul and made him positively serious.

Lady Gertrude was pleased. She studied her son carefully, and felt that he was very unlikely to get into



any fresh scrapes. She began to wonder whether he might not really be trusted to look around for a time, but she clung to safety. Even if Elodie was not as rich as one or two of the other suitable girls she could think of, Teddy had always been fond of her, and she decided that safety first was a good maxim. Should the marriage be again postponed, he might get wounded and lose his head over some creature in a Red Cross uniform, or he might contrive to entangle himself with a Frenchwoman. You could not tell what he would do with his impulsive susceptibility and his utter lack of definite purpose.

For a week she kept him at Glenfallow, and by the time he left her she was completely assured that the wedding would take place very quietly ("owing to a family bereavement") before his leave was finished. After that there would be some wire-pulling to be done, and Teddy would reappear, still in khaki; and, so far as she was concerned, the war would be terminated. She would have liked to have seen him more sentimental; he was sentimental at times, and she would have preferred a little greater show of enthusiasm, but she put it down to war strain and counted upon the meeting with Elodie which awaited him in London.

"I have told Elodie," she said, as she saw him off on the steps, looking at him with her handsome, domineering eyes, "that there really is no reason for delay. Her letters are very unsatisfactory."

Teddy kissed her on the ear and got into the car. He was only just beginning to realize fully that his mother had no longer the smallest power over him, and that the former question of getting enough money out of his father was settled once and for all. It gave him a rather queer feeling for a moment. She had made him feel the pull often enough in times past, and he had propitiated her frequently, until it had become a habit. Of course he was in love with Elodie,

and now that Gleeson was safely under lock and key, things were as peaceable as he himself could wish. He hated being hustled. As he thought it over while the car swung out through the entrance gates, and on mature consideration, which had taken him five minutes, he decided that Elodie was not to be rushed. If she liked the idea and wanted to go to Glenfallow he was perfectly ready to marry her at the given time decided for them both by his mother, but if she did not—he lighted a cigarette—why, there was really no need to make a fuss.

Teddy usually stayed at Claridge's, and when he arrived there he had every intention of going up to Knightsbridge later in the afternoon. He thought of taking Elodie out to dinner, and after the dulness and depression of Glenfallow he felt that relaxation of some sort was necessary.

He was standing in the hall waiting for the key of his room, when he heard himself spoken to, and he turned quickly with a distinct sensation of pleasure. The voice was the voice of Edith Ransome, and Edith herself stood smiling in her old, baffling way, as though secretly amused.

"Edith," he said, and came to where she was standing, her wonderfully perfect beauty striking him again, for it was months since they had met. He remembered that he had heard talk of Kingsway's infatuation, and he regarded him as a stick of a man, but still he counted a good deal. The only letter he had had from Edith had referred rather pointedly to Kingsway, for she was not above dangling her scalps when the mood took her.

"Are you staying here?" he asked, looking at her with approval in his eyes.

"No," she said, glancing away from him, "I came to tea with Lottie Benson. It's such a bore, Jack has come back from Mesopotamia of all places; surely if a man gets there he might have the decency to stay

there. I had to fix up things so as there shouldn't be a row. Lottie was having a perfectly splendid time with Archie, and of course this has spoilt it all."

"Then where are you staying?" Teddy was not in the least interested in Lottie or her raging love affairs, which followed one upon another like rapid fire.

"I have taken a flat in St. James's Court," she said, and again their eyes met; "not a bad little place. I'm going there now, Teddy. Come and have tea?"

Teddy turned and gave an order to the porter, and, without saying anything more, he followed her through the door and down the steps.

This was what he had really wanted, only he had not known it before. Edith would be glorious, and Elodie would want to talk about the war; she would be too serious for his present rehabilitated mood. Yes, Elodie would talk as though they were merely acquaintances, and he wanted quite a different experience. It would be like having a cup of tea when you needed brandy. If Elodie was the kind of girl you could—— He stopped in the middle of his fancies—it was just because she was not that he thought her so suitable—or that his mother did. As they drove in a taxi to Edith's flat he held her hand in his, and the soft, dreamy scent she used floated around him like a cloud. Sometimes Edith had been very unkind, there was that time at Glenfield, for instance, but now she was being—he recurred to his former adjective—glorious. He wanted very much to know what she had done or was still doing with Kingsway. Men appeared and disappeared where Edith was concerned almost as though she was a juggler. What had she done with the stiff and notorious Kingsway?

"Any news of Maxie?" he asked, and then he kissed her.

Edith gave him another of her terribly disturbing looks.

"He's all right," she said indifferently. "He has this mad idea of being written to, and he worries me about it in all his letters. Why can't a man go for two days without a post, once he gets to France?"

"Do you write?"

The taxi had stopped in the courtyard and he helped her out.

"Sometimes," she said vaguely.

Again he wondered about Kingsway, and he felt that the disposition of the photographs on her writing-table would give him a clue. He was more and more increasingly anxious on the subject.

"I heard to-day," Edith said as they got into the lift, "that you are going to marry the little red-haired girl."

"Oh, did you?" He was nettled by something in her voice, "Well, what if I am?"

"Nothing," she replied, and again they smiled at each other.

Arriving in the drawing-room, which was a good size and decorated with blue brocade curtains, Teddy made a swift scrutiny. Kingsway was not there, and on the writing-table there was only a large photograph of Maxie, and one of a very young naval cadet who signed himself "Chubbs." Nothing to fear from that quarter, for though Edith allowed these youthful passions, she treated them with a firm hand. "Chubbs" would have his precious neck wrung sooner or later. He felt immensely relieved, and he stood in the centre of the room and caught Edith in his arms.

"I'm so damned glad to see you," he said briefly. "It's far worse out there than we ever say, and, Edith, you know how much I have always cared."

"Do I?" Her face was close to his, and her large eyes were wonderfully soft and full of feeling.

There was a change in Edith Ransome, and Teddy

had not the least idea what to attribute it to, but he appreciated it to the full. He never for a moment thought that his father's death had the smallest connexion with his sudden happiness, nor did he know that Kingsway had altered his allegiance to another quarter with as fine an indifference as that shown frequently by Edith herself.

It was becoming very difficult to think of Elodie, and as he and Mrs. Ransome sat over tea together, he genuinely wished that he had not chanced to meet her at all. She had always played the mischief with him, and he was not altogether easy in mind.

"It's just possible there may be a wire for me," he said. "I was only given special leave and I am at the end of a string. If my old man is making war during the next five days it will mean a recall for me almost at once."

"Take me out to dine, Teddy, I'm so miserable." Edith lay back against the cushions. "Now that you have come back I can't let you go."

Teddy consulted his conscience, which gave him a weak reminder, and then he temporized.

"I will go and see if that wire has come," he said; "if it hasn't, of course I'll take you out."

It took a long time to part from her, and when he got back to Claridge's there was no wire.

Teddy dressed himself, and began a note to Elodie. He could tell her that he had met a friend and that he would be round in the morning, and he was halfway through a hasty scrawl when a yellow envelope was carried in to him on a tray. It was his recall sure enough, and it meant that he must catch the leave train at 7.45 the following morning. He stood looking at it, and then crumpled it up and threw it on the floor. What was he going to do now?

If he wanted to see Elodie he must give up the evening with Edith, and until he felt that it was being snatched from him he had not realized all it stood for.

Of course he must ring Edith up and tell her that he couldn't take her out. It was rotten luck, but otherwise he would have to go back without seeing Elodie. He tore up the letter he had written and stared at the floor. The subject of his meeting with Elodie was their forthcoming marriage, and now it had been postponed once more by his old man. In that case there wasn't really very much for them to talk of, was there? He asked himself the question, and he thought there was not. Elodie would be as distant as the stars, and he didn't want to study astronomy. And then, Edith had been so genuinely glad to see him back, she had transported him into the past, when he had been head over ears in love with her and hadn't much cared whether Maxie discovered it or not; only at that time his father had been alive and it complicated things. At one time one seemed to be wildly in love and careless of the consequences, and then one got out of it and said prayers of thankfulness.

Now, in a flash, Edith had returned again, and, until her return, he had not realized how much he had really missed her during the intervening time. Her words, her manner, her complete and finished comprehension of him was so much more satisfying than Elodie's barely concealed indifference. If it wasn't for the fact that he had to marry, it would all be perfectly simple. Edith had spoken, not casually, but quite earnestly of her own feelings, and she had shown no jealousy of Elodie, she merely left her out. He could not marry Edith—he took up his cigarette-case and lighted a cigarette reflectively—no, even if she was free, he wasn't sure that he would do that. Mercifully there was no question of it. Maxie adored her, and, though he raged and stormed, he would not agree to a divorce. His own love for Edith would continue for a time, possibly for years, and then, after the fashion of these things, their moods would change and neither would exist any more for the other. Only

men like Maxie ever attempted to marry the Ediths of this world. But meantime, there was the question of the evening and how it was to be spent. He admired Edith's fine lawlessness tremendously, and he had such luck in meeting her. To go and chuck it all would really be an incomprehensible piece of stupidity. He recalled the moment in the taxi when with a sudden access of physical trembling he had taken her hands in his without speaking a single word. She had given him a different response to any he had ever known in all his various experiences, many of which he had forgotten utterly, and a few of which he remembered with surprise at himself. He got up and put on a light overcoat. If he looked in at Elodie for a few minutes it would be enough, and he could make up an excuse quite well.

At the door of the hotel he changed his mind again. What was the use of going there at all, merely to tell a whole tissue of lies? He didn't like telling lies, and besides, it wasted time, which was already short enough.

Within half an hour he and Edith were dining together at the Ritz; he was going to ring up Elodie when they got back to the flat in St. James's Court, and so she wouldn't sit up too late thinking he was still to come.

Edith looked wonderful, and she had begun to do her hair in a new way. It was brushed back from her forehead and gave her a far more definite look of character and strength. Men were really good judges, he thought; no woman could have been loved so completely and continuously as Edith, who had not very remarkable qualities. The music of the string band raised him to a feeling of tempest, and their journey back to the flat was like a dream.

"We can't go on like this," Edith said, as he sat on the brocaded sofa, holding her throat in his hands and marvelling at its firm, soft texture. "I tried to

put you out of my life, Teddy, but it wasn't any use."

"Edith," he said, and his voice sounded strange to himself, "if anything should happen to Maxie will you marry me?"

"Nothing will happen to him," she replied, her eyes drooping and weary, and her red mouth sad. "Don't you know that they are going to put it in the Life Insurance Questions—'Does your wife love you?' and if you write 'No,' you get taken at half-rates." She laughed as she spoke.

"Would you, if—— Poor old Maxie, I don't mean that I want him to stop bullets—but if——?"

Edith leaned closer to him, and she pressed her face to his.

"Yes," she said slowly, "I will, Teddy. You know that I will."

The odd thing was, that he hadn't meant to say it, and he had made quite sure that he wouldn't ever say it. How was it, then, that he, engaged to Elodie, had really asked Edith to marry him if her husband should be killed in the war? It wasn't the sort of thing to do, and Teddy would have felt disgusted and ashamed of himself at any other time, but just then it came naturally. He described it as "facing facts." Maxie ran the same risks as the rest, and one couldn't blind oneself to it. If Edith pretended to care it would only be sheer hypocrisy. She had often told him that she did not care, and, held in the grip of his arms, it was futile to pretend anything. He had almost forgotten all about Elodie, and he certainly did not want to remember. All he knew was that Edith had capitulated. Long before, he had asked her to go away with him, and she didn't see it in at all the same light; she said that he was foolish. He couldn't take her away now, but if what they both described vaguely as "anything" happened to Maxie, Edith would be free.



She said nothing about Elodie; not one word. Any other woman would have made a fuss and wanted him to—— By Gad, he had never rung her up—— He looked at the clock and saw that it was nearly 2 A.M. Time had flown.

"You'll write to me," he said, kissing her again, and she promised that she would, before they parted.

"Anything may have happened before I get back," was his last word to her.

When he had gone, Edith sat down and her whole face changed. She looked discontented, and her arms hung limply by her side. She was really so tired of love, and yet she couldn't face life without it. She had begun to crave for the flesh-pots of respectability, and Maxie was only able to give her money and a certain standing which was not more than mediocre. As the wife of one of the richest men in England she would be able to make herself felt, and wipe out some of the insults she had suffered. Teddy was sure to stand for Parliament, and, with a little pushing, he might very easily be raised to the Peerage. It would be quite amusing to take it out of Lady Gertrude, her sturdy opponent, and it would be altogether a splendid smack in the face for a number of people. She was nearly forty, and the existing state of affairs could not go on for ever, and, in any case, she was desperately bored by it. She owed Kingsway a shot, too, and intended to have it. He had treated her badly, and now he was going to marry a niece of Gertrude Harrington's, that was also amusing. The one and only thing which stood between her and all she wanted was Maxie. Maxie, whose father had cut him off on her account, and who loved her desperately. She hated him, and, getting up, she threw his photograph on to the floor. She did not care a rap about Harrington, but he never annoyed her in the same way as Maxie did. There was one of his letters lying unopened on

the table, and she knew it would have the same complaints in every page. "Why hadn't she written? Why hadn't she sent him the things he had asked her for?" He wanted this and that, and he never seemed to dream of writing to Harrods and sending a list as a sensible man would do.

Again she began to think. Why was it that Wilfred, her brother-in-law, had been killed? Alice adored him, and his death brought her poverty and despair together. Then there was Averil Lessington, her own niece, who had been engaged to Arthur Sholto, and he had been killed. Averil was a wreck, and had lost her looks, and she was never likely to get another man to care. It seemed so cynical and cruel the way these things were arranged. Lottie, her friend, with whom she had passed the afternoon, was savage about it; she thought that Jack was disposed of, and then he arrived with his arm in a sling, likely to remain at home for months and months. Her thoughts never rose for a second above her own personal point of view, for she was incapable of feeling anything which did not affect herself.

She lighted a cigarette and narrowed her beautiful eyes. Teddy was not going to escape again, she was sure of that now. Eventually, if that convenient "anything" had not happened to Maxie, she was prepared to let Teddy make things happen. Maxie had not even distinguished himself in the war; hadn't had so much as a "mention," and she disregarded him utterly. The dust on the carpet was not a lesser thing to her. She yawned wearily and went to a mirror and looked carefully at her face. She bore her years wonderfully well, and she studied the little lines near her eyes attentively, and then she laughed. She remembered how Teddy had looked as he left the flat.

In the morning she had a wire from him: "God bless you, darling, and good-bye." She had had a good many wires of the same kind in her life, but, as

matches were short, she made the paper into six slender spills.

There was nothing to do now but wait for events to happen, and so she asked "Chubbs" to tea, and he came, bearing a votive offering of flowers.

## CHAPTER XX

**T**HERE was nothing but relief in Elodie's face when she came into Hilda's room in the morning with the news that Teddy had found a wire of recall upon his arrival in London, and had been obliged to leave at once.

Hilda, who knew everything there was to know about leave trains, looked surprised, but she held her peace. It was quite possible that Teddy had boarded some gorgeous special, unknown to infantry officers and those who were not on the Staff, and leaving Victoria at an unlikely hour in the night. She kissed Elodie and read the letter thoughtfully. It was written more carelessly than was usual even for Teddy, and he had blotted it so hastily that one page was nearly illegible. There was haste in the writing, and constraint in the expression of the phrases, and no allusion to the postponed wedding conversation anywhere. "Odd" was the word which suggested itself to Hilda, but she did not say it aloud.

Lady Gertrude had also written a pontifical letter, in which she said that she would come up to London at once to help in the arrangements. She outlined her tremendous plans, and said that she was prepared to attend the ceremony in spite of the fact that she was not yet receiving any one at Glenfallow. She described the funeral briefly, "because Teddy will have told you all this himself," and said that she had written to her lawyers about various necessary arrangements concerning settlements. They would have to see Lord Almwroth's lawyer about some points, though, she hinted, of course Elodie's own worldly possessions were hardly worth speaking of.

"It's a beastly letter," Elodie said, as she sat at the foot of Hilda's bed. "I think that Teddy's mamma is the most poisonous old woman in England."

"Write and tell her to stop barking," Hil said, looking up from her own letter from Larry, "or tell her to go and bark up another tree. Have done with them, Elodie, they are all such hopeless shams. You can't call them real people."

"Dad told me," said Elodie, laying down Lady Gertrude's letter, "that Teddy's grandfather was a wicked old thing, but that later in life he spent his time writing moral reflections to all his friends. Do you think he forgot what he had been, or did he never know? Hypocrites always amuse me, Hil, they live in glass houses—nobody retorts upon them with stones. Anyhow, Teddy has gone, and it remains for me to write and break it all off."

"Then write to-day," Hilda counselled.

Elodie was happier than she had been for some time, but she decided to give Teddy time to get back, and also to wait until the push was over, before she sent her ultimatum. She had an intensely strong feeling for people, often completely misplaced and astray, and she thought that she would let him off any kind of extra worry. It hardly mattered now, because she had written to Kenny and the letter was already in the post starting on its long weary journey to Germany. She was going to a dance that night, and, though at times she felt far too old, she was able to throw off her depression and be young again. All day she worked at files, and the routine helped the time to pass, and in the evening she stood and said good-night to Hilda, looking at her with bright eyes.

"I've got a new pair of gold shoes," she said. "Look at them, Hil, aren't they pretty?"

"Go off and dance, child," Hil said, laughing, "you are a regular peacock at times."

Elodie was enjoying the dance, and at midnight

Ronald Carey, known as "Chubbs," came in and found her in a corner. He looked as though he had been through some rather painful ordeal, and he spoke to Elodie without his habitual effervescence of manner. Chubbs was always in extremes and spoke in italics; he made his life into a long romance, and he was a fervent young man with ideals. Elodie liked him, and when she noticed that the temperature was low she began to laugh at him a little.

"Who is it now?" she asked, "I'm sure you are in love."

"Don't, Elodie," he said pathetically. "Can't you give me that next dance?"

"I'm here for exercise," she said dubiously. "If I do cut Loftus Hunt, it will be mean that you won't dance. Is there really anything you want to say?"

"I'm damned miserable," he said, and so Elodie relented.

The story he had to tell was vague and patchy; it left out names and lacked descriptive fire, but the fragments were all there—indeed the tale was based upon fragments—the fragments of a telegram.

He had been asked to tea with some one, and the some one in question was obviously the owner of his heart. She was a wonderful person, the sort of woman who, if she turned and spoke to you, you felt as if you'd had a wreath put on your head, or its equivalent. Chubbs had actually dared to love her, though the idea was bold enough to alarm a brave man. He knew that he was only a boy, and that he must keep his feelings to himself; but she had been so good to him, and he found himself telling her about it, "in the abstract."

"You haven't gone and got engaged," said Elodie, who had no faith in Chubbs's powers of selection.

"Engaged! Good Lord, Elodie, she's *married*," he said, not without a touch of pride at the audacity and lack of principle the word suggested.

"Oh, that's all right," said Elodie, and listened rather regretfully to the distant sound of the "Destiny" waltz.

Tea had been ambrosia, or nectar, or whatever the gods drink, and Chubbs had climbed to the seventh heaven, and then the blow had fallen. "She" went to put on her hat and Lieutenant Carey began to fiddle and fidget round the room. He had always fiddled as a child, and the habit had stuck to him. Now that he was both elated and exalted he fiddled more than ever. She had said that she liked men to be young. They hadn't reached the cynical stage which made life so blank a disillusion, and she thought that at twenty-three you were often at your very best. There was Pitt, who had been Prime Minister at twenty-one, Napoleon a General at twenty-four, and there were a lot of others whose names she couldn't remember, but, anyhow, it all went to prove that she thought youth the best time of a man's life. She herself had always kept her illusions, though it had not been easy, and it was not an easy world to live in, not in the least. She had then quoted some beautiful lines:

The morning dew lies still undried  
Along my fields at noon.

Elodie was getting very tired of the lady, and she began to wonder when Chubbs, who seemed prepared to talk all night, would come to the point.

"I simply *worshipped her*," he said. "I had almost told her so, Elodie, but of course, with her husband at the war I had to steer wide of anything too personal."

"She had gone to get her hat," Elodie said pointedly.

"Yes, I know I'm making a rigmarole out of it, but I'm getting to the point now."

Chubbs had fiddled his way to the mantelpiece, and

there he had occupied himself with undoing the spills, not with the least idea of prying into other people's concerns, and outside there was no writing on the paper. He undid them all, and without looking, just as if he were playing an entirely honourable game of "consequences," and then he turned the accursed things over, and staring at him, with the date, dripping as it were with "morning dew" of that very morning, he read the words of farewell.

"Perhaps it was from her husband?" Elodie remarked. She saw nothing so upsetting in it after all.

"No, it wasn't," Chubbs retorted angrily, "the blighter's name was 'Teddy.' Now I know that she calls her husband——" he pulled himself up short—"I mustn't tell you what, only it's not Teddy."

Elodie stirred in her seat.

"And he sent it to her this morning?" she asked with a curiously subtle difference in her manner. She, too, felt as though she had inadvertently read secrets over some one's shoulder.

"You see, old girl, I felt such a swine," he said, stumbling on to the end. "I had to fold them up again and put them back on the mantelpiece. I knew what she didn't intend me to know, and once you *know* a thing you can't be the same. Of course I took her out, but she can read you like a book, and though she couldn't guess what had happened, and I didn't feel I could tell her, she just took me up by the scruff of the neck and put me down miles away. Oh, it's damnable, and I wish I was back on the ship again."

It was a very silly story really, and Elodie did her best to cheer Chubbs, for whom she felt sympathy. She took him out of the shadowy recesses and introduced him to Mona Adair, whose laugh was enough to drive away misery. All the rest of the evening she puzzled over the odd coincidence of the name, and she



wanted to ask Chubbs who it was that had been the heroine of his last affair. If she could know the name it might clear the matter up, or it might—— After all, Teddy was a very ordinary contraction. This Teddy might be an Edward, and have nothing to say to Harrington. She told herself that her great desire to feel that Teddy “wouldn’t mind,” was warping her common sense. If he were really the sender of the telegram it put everything right, so far as her own part was concerned; but then again, if he had found some one whom he really cared for, why had he not told her honestly about it all? It was always far simpler to be honest, and yet so many people complicated life with empty intrigues. Elodie had not yet learnt that most people, like Lady Gertrude, prefer “safety first,” and Teddy was no magnificent exception to any very average rule.

When she got back to the flat she awoke Hilda with all the ruthlessness of youth.

“Hil, I must tell you something,” she said, and she sat brushing her hair and talking eagerly.

“Do you think it is Teddy?” she asked at length.

“You can’t convict him,” Hil said unhesitatingly, “not on that evidence, El. No jury would stand it for a moment. Who do you suppose the lady to be? If you can get any kind of clue to the fact it may help. I wonder what the average of ‘Teddys’ on leave trains is? Write and ask the *Daily Mail*. If it is one in fifty you have a basis for suspicion.”

Elodie said that she couldn’t tell who the lady was. “She is married, and her husband is in France; she is a beautiful demon, the regular syren of melodrama, and she talks poetry.” Her face clouded a little. “It hardly suggests Teddy, somehow.”

“She may talk to suit her company,” suggested Hil. “Aunt Lucy, rest her soul, used to say that in her young days a *lady* could talk four languages and adapt her conversation to all society alike, which

amused us. Perhaps she adapts herself to her company; but what an awful warning to fiddlers. Go to bed, Elodie, I have to be up early, as we are in for a rush of work."

Elodie did not think very much of the question again, and she kept to her decision not to write to Teddy until the push was over.

She heard from Kenny, and life looked brighter, and dances kept her amused for two or three evenings out of every week. One got used to things and made the best of them, that was all.

One evening, in the hour between tea and time to get ready for dinner, she was sitting with Hil talking over the daily gossip of the Ministry. The evenings were growing short, and the autumn was already taking hold of late summer and making it hasten its departure, and there was a sense of coming cold in the evening air. The post had come, and brought nothing with it of any interest, when the bell rang violently twice, foretelling the advent of a telegram. Hil sat back and grew rigid. She was never able to hear the two abrupt rings without deadly shrinkings of the heart, and it was a relief to her when the servant handed the abomination to Elodie on a tray.

She watched her tear it open and read it. Other people's telegrams are nearly as interesting as our own. The girl's face altered quickly as she read, and she looked at Hilda helplessly.

"Hil, this is from Lady Gertrude. She says that Teddy is missing. Isn't it awful?"

"Missing?" Hil echoed. It was what they had first heard of Kenny, and the word had been burdened with tragedy for her ever since.

There was nothing to do but wire back, and begin the round of inquiries which might bring in some further word of him; but "missing," out away in No Man's Land, dying by inches of consuming thirst

and awful pain, left in some by-place of the war, and perhaps already dead.

"I'm glad I didn't write," Elodie said in a voice that trembled a little; "Hil, I'm awfully glad I didn't; for perhaps he will never have to know now, poor old Ted."

## CHAPTER XXI

THE closed fly bumped on over the road which led back to Crefeld, and Kennedy sat in silent astonishment, listening to what Karl had to say.

He had forgotten about *Mon Repas* and the Levantine, the waiter who attended him, and all the rest of it. They had, so far as he was concerned, vanished into space. But with lowered and husky voice the corporal of the guard talked on.

"*Mein Herr*, you do not guess what trouble of mind I had. Brandt was an inspector, and he visited all the restaurants from time to time. He had an old grudge against me, and came there to make trouble."

"I remember the beast," Kenny said after a moment, "why, of course I do. I remember it all now. I thought the food bad at the time, but one lives and learns. Well, Fritz?"

"There was that so kind, so *zärtlich* in the way you looked and spoke, that I said to mine self, 'As there is a Gott in Heaven I will give information to the *Herr*.' You know that at first we believed that we should invade England within a week of war, and I had thought to beg of you to believe that trouble was coming swiftly. I asked of you to return, and night by night I watched by my little table, and watched the door, hoping that it would open and that you would come in; but you never came more."

He talked on as the fly crawled along the road, and gave Kenny an outline of the original mobilization scheme, and the failure of the first German plan. Brandt was rounding up the men everywhere in the small restaurants, and then some one had stabbed him in a back lane in Soho, and much good time was lost.

Who had actually allowed himself the pleasure of knifing Brandt he did not say.

"I fight for a time on the Russian front," Haff went on; "for a time I am in that mud-hole Poland, and at length, my sight being bad, I am recalled to do other work. My home is in Silesia, and I try hard to get back there, and no one is ever kind to me. In all my memories no one spoke to me as a friend as you have done. Often I think of you, *mein Herr*, and pray that you are well and safe, but of course I know nothing. At last I am sent to Crefeld and made corporal of the prison guard. I care very little for any one, and it is all the same to me who comes there. And one evening, at the hour when the guard is changed, I came in, and seeing you, so thin, so changed, I felt my heart swell as though it must break. In one moment I see that I must hide all surprise, and so I go outside until I have thought for a time."

"For God's sake, man, tell me if you can help me to get out," said Kennedy impatiently. Haff was so overwhelmingly sentimental in his reminiscences that he wanted to cut them short.

Karl, having thought things over for a few minutes, at once saw the need of impressing every one, even Kennedy, with his special hostility towards the new prisoner. He did not expect Kennedy to recognize him, and he had made an excuse and come to Room 24 and looked at him over and over again, for he was half afraid that Gleeson might suddenly recall him to mind, and show that he had done so.

"But you had forgotten," Karl said humbly. "Why should you remember me?"

"I'm afraid I had," Kenny agreed rather apologetically, for he hated hurting the feelings of any one who only wanted to be kind; "and, as well as that, I hadn't seen you making ugly faces before." He stifled a laugh, for prisoners driving with a solitary

guard were not in the habit of indulging in outbursts of the kind.

"I put your letters under your pillow, but you did not guess who had placed them there."

"I did not, indeed. I gave the credit to Urlaub."

"Urlaub will do nothing," Haff said, touching Kenny's arm with a warning finger. "He is kind, and he likes his gentlemen, but were he to suspect that you thought of escaping he would report at once to the *Herr Kommandant*."

"Look here," said Kennedy suddenly, "I must get out. Is there any way which you can suggest? The summer is nearly over, and once the days grow dark early there is a better chance, but how is it to be done?"

Karl sat back, and breathed his heavy, stertorous breath.

"I have thought of many ways, but all are difficult. The greatest difficulty of all else is that I may not speak to you, and that from now to the moment when it will be safe to make the attempt I shall probably not again get a chance to explain things clearly. Listen, then, and remember all that I say."

"I shall remember," Kenny said with conviction.

"You do not know the town of Crefeld?"

Kennedy said he did not. He had never been there before the night of his arrival as a prisoner.

"Well,"—Haff spread out his hands widely, crossing his fingers—"every street in Crefeld goes so—criss-cross in long, straight lines like a gridiron. Up through the centre runs the Friedrichsten Hosten Strasse, crossed at the far end by the Ober Strasse and the Kanal Strasse. Around the centre of the town there is the Nord Wall, Ost Wall, Süd Wall and West Wall, so; and near to the Nord Wall is our *Kasernen*. It would be one of the first streets you could come to, *mein Herr*."

"But you have left out how I am to get there,"

said Kenny, longing to shake the shoulders of his friend.

"That I must arrange for later, and to-day, it is to tell you what you are to do that I must try," said Karl excitedly. "The way to escape will come quickly, and that must be for later. In a little corner by the Ost Wall there is a restaurant called the *Ewige Lampe*; it stands in by the corner where the Süd Wall joins in an angle. The *Ewige Lampe* is kept by my good friend Brüderich. He will have to be paid, but he is to be trusted. Outside the house there is a lamp on a big, fine iron stand, you cannot miss it. It is a small place, and the folk who go there are not of importance. If they ask your nationality you say you are Scandinavian."

"But my clothes?" Kenny said. "How am I to get rid of my uniform?"

"I have planned all that," Haff said, not without pride. "You know that every month the mattress is taken to be refilled with straw and paper?"

"I believe it is," agreed Kennedy.

"I shall go round and look at the mattresses," went on Karl, "and I can put a bundle into yours where it will be perfectly safe. A suit of my own of serge, a shirt, and an ordinary fisherman's hat, which will cover your face. You must stay on at the *Ewige Lampe* until your beard is grown, so."

"And I can put the clothes on under my uniform?"

"Certainly, *mein Herr*, and whatever day is safe for your escape I myself will call the roll. It must be at a time when the *Kommandant* is away for some days, and Urlaub will not report to him until he has made a search. After that, all the frontier posts will be warned, and then the more difficult part of the journey must begin."

"It isn't far from Crefeld to the frontier, as the crow flies," said Kenny, thinking hard, "I ought to be able to do it, even on foot, in forty-eight hours."

Karl Haff shook his head. "*Nein*, that will be too big a risk. You must go up the Rhine. From Crefeld to Zevenaar the river winds very much, it is almost like the Somme, only that it is so beautiful——"

"I can enjoy all that as I go," interrupted Kenny. "Tell me the line, and what are the towns I have to pass through."

"First you will come to Duisburg, passing the waterside town of Uerdingen, on to Orsoy, Rheinberg, Wesel, and by Xanten to Emmerich, where the people are nearly all Dutch, and from there to Lobith and then to Elten, which is the frontier." He wiped the perspiration from his forehead, and gave a gasping sigh.

Kennedy repeated the names of the towns carefully, until he knew them off by heart. His spirits were rising with every moment, and he gripped his jailer's hands hard. "I wish to God you could get some idea as to how the actual escape can be managed," he said; and he suggested his own idea of going to the dentist and getting out of the house, but Karl Haff would have none of it.

"It is far too dangerous," he said stolidly. "The guard would know at once, and all you could count upon would be, at most, half an hour's start in broad daylight. Brüderich would not help us, for it would be too big a risk for him, and he is a quiet man. We must have twenty-four hours, if possible, and a false scent. No one is likely to suspect that you would remain in Crefeld. *Ach, mein Herr*, be patient. Soon the dark evenings will come, and that will make everything more simple. Always I shall be studying the details. I shall watch the house of the *Herr Kommandant*, and when he goes away it will be our moment."

"And how am I going to get the opportunity of hearing the plan from you?" Kennedy demanded.



"We must fix that up, Fritz, because there may be no other chance."

"I have thought of this," said Haff. "You know when the letters are sorted and read, *mein Herr*, that the post-bag is thrown to me, and I give the packets to the orderlies to distribute according to room numbers. If you give me an envelope addressed to yourself, I can put a few lines in writing inside that will tell you what to do; the place and the hour."

Kennedy felt in his pocket and took out a bundle of letters, and, taking the least worn of the envelopes, he handed them to Karl.

"I'm damned grateful to you," he said, "God alone knows if I shall ever be able to repay you for what you have done for me."

"It is still to do," said Karl; "but at least, *mein Herr*, I have no longer the misery to think that you regard me as an enemy. It has been very hard, but I have said that in the end you would understand."

He drew up the corner of the blind and looked out. The fly had bumped its way to the Nord Strasse, and was coming round the corner, past a tobacconist's shop, and a little shop where they sold flowers, and the gates of the *Husaren Kasernen* were opened for their reception.

There had been no time to ask Karl a single question about his comrades of Room 24, and Kenny got out, and was conducted to the bath-house to be disinfected. He felt quite glad to see Urlaub, who greeted him with undisguised pleasure, and his "*Wie geht es, Herr Leutnant?*" rang with feeling. Urlaub had not exactly worried himself about Gleeson, but he had thought of him from time to time, and was glad to see him back. He was thin, and he looked as though he had suffered, but there was not the least change in his eyes and voice. It is by the eyes and the voice that you can tell how far deprivation or brutality has af-

fecting a man. Urlaub looked at Kenny's direct glance and felt satisfied.

"You have had a rough time, down there, *nicht wahr?*" he said, and he handed Gleeson a bundle of parcels and letters which had been collecting for him in the guard-house.

Kenny nodded silently, he was not equal to discussing the subject.

"Any new convicts?" he demanded.

"*Ach, mein Herr*, how well I remember the first day you came here, and you said you wanted to know what enemies were within. It has often made me laugh since."

"I'm glad it amused you," said Kennedy, "I don't know that I thought it one of my best jokes. How are all my friends?"

Urlaub pursed up his loose mouth and shook his head.

"*Lieber Herr Gott!* We have had a terrible tragedy. The *Herr Leutnant* Bland is dead."

Kennedy started, genuinely distressed and grieved at the news.

"What did he die of?" he asked.

Urlaub took off his cap with a pious gesture, and then put his fingers round his neck, to indicate that Bland had been choked.

"I don't understand," said Kennedy. "What was it?"

"The *Herr Leutnant* was very sad, *mein Herr*. For days he would not eat, so that when I told my wife Gerda, who is indeed a kind soul, she made an *apfel kompot*, and it got through to him, but he would not eat it. The *Herr Hauptmann* Palliser was anxious; though he laughed and made jokes and played the gramophone, he watched the *Herr Leutnant* like a nurse, his heart is full of kindness. Then one day, the English mail having come in, and there being no letter for the poor *Herr Leutnant*, he made

some excuse to go back to Room 24, when the other officers were taking exercise on the parade ground, and he was found strangled. He had hanged himself, *mein Herr*, with the bed-clothes."

Kennedy said nothing. He was thinking of his own memories of little Bland, and amid all the wide sea of misery which encircled the prisoners it had been likely enough that he would drown. Unquestionably he had believed himself forgotten by all those whom he loved, and the spirit within had failed and faltered. Day by day the bitterness of utter loneliness had risen around him, until, in the end, he had loosed his grip on any further desire for life. It was the terrible isolation and loneliness of it all which had overcome him, and he had never been a strong soul, well equipped for the fierce battle against which his destiny had pitted him. Every one had done what they could, and the *Kommandant*, when he knew that the boy was ailing, had sent him English books and papers to read. There had been no real unkindness; no one was ever unkind to Bland, but the thought that all the roses in the garden of his soul had withered and fallen from neglect and forgetfulness had been too great a burden on his frail spirit. His love for Dolly had been the lamp of his life, and it had burnt out because she could not go on remembering. She had begun well, but time had intervened, so she forgot.

Neither Kenny nor Urlaub spoke any more, and Gleeson took up his own mail and went up the staircase and along the corridor.

He opened the door into Room 24, and looked round. Compton and Palliser greeted him at once, and the French and Russian officers were glad to welcome him, and then he saw the outline of a well-remembered head, and he crossed the room quickly to where the new inmate was sitting at a table, his back to the room and his ears covered with his hands.

"By Gad, Teddy," he said, putting his hand on his shoulder, "this is a bit of a surprise."

Harrington looked up, and he sprang to his feet.

"Kenny, it's you, is it? They said you'd be damned lucky if you ever came back here alive."

The last meeting and the old quarrel were forgotten, and Teddy immediately began a long account of his capture. He had been in a very unsuccessful advance, planned by his old man, and the counter-attack had knocked things to pieces. He and G.S.O. 1 had been in a car together, clearing out as fast as possible, and the car had broken down. G.S.O. 1 had been killed, and he had been taken prisoner by Wolfsbrunnen, an old friend of his own, who had done what he could for him, and got him sent down comfortably to Crefeld; Kenny thought of his own experience as he listened.

Teddy was acutely bored; he was furious when he found that he could not have a room to himself, and he stated that he considered that he was in a living grave. He didn't like the Russians, and the Frenchmen got on his nerves, and he occupied far more space than he had really any right to demand.

"Isn't it a filthy hole?" he said, as he sat down again and looked up at Kenny, "and, by Gad, you look in pretty poor condition yourself."

"If you'd been where I've been, you'd think Room 24 Paradise," said Kennedy briefly, and he walked back to where Compton and Palliser were sitting.

Teddy, glad to find some one out of his own world to talk to, continued his conversation, and broke in constantly while Palliser began to tell Gleeson about poor little Bland. Teddy regarded Bland's death as another grievance. He had been put into his bed, just under the hook on the wall where the luckless boy had committed suicide.

"A nice, cheery sort of reception," he said, obviously regarding the affair as a personal insult.

"I feel as if it was my fault for letting that kid out of my sight," said Palliser, who ignored Harrington with quite as much rudeness as Harrington showed in his own manner to him. "He was always sensitive and shy, and that damned little rotter had chucked him. We found a letter of hers saying that she was 'awfully sorry' and all the rest of it, but she 'couldn't stand the strain.' God! Kennedy, I'm going to call on her when I get back to England, and I'll tell her what one man thinks of her, anyhow. I can't get it out of my head, and towards the last he used to sit up in his bed nearly all night staring at the window, and then once or twice, I fancy, whenever I go over it in my mind, he wanted to tell me, because he woke me and said he felt pretty bad, and, instead of getting him to talk, I laughed at him. Honestly, I acted for the best as I saw it, but it's made me years older."

Compton coughed irritably.

"We shall have to make a rule not to talk of it," he said, but his own face told of added suffering.

"I've made out a report for the Prison Authorities," said Teddy, who cared nothing at all about Bland, except that he had the misfortune to inherit his bed.

And then the conversation became general, and the futility of reports was talked over, while Kenny read his letters. It was strange to be reading a letter from Elodie while Harrington was sitting talking in his high, well-bred voice, and laying down the law to Compton. Kennedy finished her letter and put it into his pocket, and then began to read one from Hilda, giving a long account of her work.

"It isn't that I don't like it, for I do like it, Ken, and it is a taste which grows on one. I am now an all-powerful being in the eyes of twenty girls, some very dirty little girls, and some quite nice, and they hang on my words and watch me with awful intensity. I am not at all sure that it is good for me, and I find

myself using my power quite often, and showing off. The other day Mary Thomas came in, she had just arrived from Ireland. You remember the Thomases, very pious people, who came to church in a covered car every Sunday, and put on tremendous airs. I wanted to let Mary see what I could do, so, when she had looked round, and said, 'Why, you are really quite clever, Hilda,' twice or three times, and smiled at me like a terrier who is going to bite, I called up the stenographer, and said, 'I'm afraid you must go now, Mary,' and began to dictate a letter on the spot. I find that I think of the files and the lists and the work when I ought to be saying my prayers, and I used to feel that Larry had forgotten everything except the Battalion—even the war, for he never speaks of that, and now I am doing the same thing myself. But one of these days peace will come, and we shall have no more Ministry and no more 'Batt,' and then what shall we all do? They are trying to push Elodie into a war-wedding, but the only result is that she has definitely decided to break off everything with Teddy."

Kennedy folded up the letter quickly and looked at Harrington.

"By the way," he said, "my father is dead; you know that, Kenny, don't you?"

Kennedy asked hastily for Lady Gertrude and for news of Hilda, and, after a pause, of Elodie, but his constraint on the subject appeared to be infectious, for Teddy looked out of the window and said absently that she was "all right."

## CHAPTER XXII

EVER since the dramatic moment when Karl Haff had revealed himself to Kennedy Gleeson a change had come over his whole outlook on life. He saw the *Husaren Kasernen* with altered eyes, for he knew that his time there was to be short.

Kennedy had decided to tell Palliser, once the plan was complete, but he had no intention of mentioning it to any one else, and he heard various theories of possible escape put forward from time to time by Teddy, who allowed his dislike of the place to overflow all through Room 24. He hated Palliser's gramophone, and Compton, who had always been irritable on the subject, now permitted George to play it whenever he liked. Harrington was extremely unpopular; even de Beussent, who could make the best of almost every one, felt that the new inmate who looked so *chic* was by no means an addition to the community. Mercifully, Teddy had friends in other rooms, and he spent some of his time away.

After their first meeting the warmth which had sprung up to greet the occasion died down, and Kenny and Teddy were really no more friends in captivity than they had been in freedom. When the mails were delivered them, neither of them said anything about their letters to each other, and the name of Elodie was never again mentioned between them. This did not surprise Kenny, who had got the long letter written from the flat on the night that Teddy had not made his appearance. Elodie had said that she was going to break off everything the next day, and, so far as he knew, she had probably done so. She was free, and she was his own, she had told him so, though, she

said, he must have guessed it all ages and ages back. "Even the day you put the little green ring on my finger, Kenny, and I have it still! Did you really believe that I had thrown it away?"

Small wonder that Kennedy was a happy man, with Elodie's letter to read over and over again, and the knowledge that in a month or two he would have the signal from Karl Haff which would put him on the road for home. His spirits were so high, and he looked so unlike the others that they remarked it, and said that he was totally inexplicable.

"You don't mind anything, now," George Palliser said, with his queer, crowing laugh. "I saw that dirty fellow, the corporal of the guard, having at you when you were walking on the parade ground, and upon my word, Christian charity isn't in it. Three months ago you'd have struck him."

"One grows used to it," Kennedy said, rather lamely. "Of course the man is a pernicious swine, but perhaps he has corns, or something else which makes him cross."

"My God," said Palliser, "you amaze me, old boy! What has become of our elegant and admirable Sir Frederick? The place stinks of his hair wash. Look here, Kenny, I do think that it's a bit thick. That ghastly ass has a mother who is, I suppose, much like her son, and she sends him out wads of stuff."

"I know," said Kenny.

"I don't *mind* his having it, but he is so mean with what he has. Money's no object; and look at the boxes of cigarettes, the bath-towels, the tablecloths, the down quilt on his bed, and the piles of boxes of food. He might spare one or two pairs of socks, or something, for the Russians. They don't get a stitch now, and we only just get enough; but Harrington, who is snowed under with presents, never thinks of handing out what he can't use for himself."

It was certainly true that Teddy was not magnani-



mous, and Kennedy was at a loss for any defence to make. Lady Gertrude, with unlimited means to spend as she liked, sent everything she could think of to her absent son. It was very natural, but it made the contrast sharp.

"Is the fellow engaged?" went on George Palliser, who was always immensely concerned with other people's affairs. "There's many a time when I get precious little by the post, and I watch you lucky devils reading your *dâk*, because there's nothing better to do. I've seen Harrington looking as though butter *was* melting in his infernal mouth, and I said to myself that it couldn't have been a mother's blessing that made him grin like that."

"I don't know," said Kennedy, uncomfortably conscious that his own face must have been under the same scrutiny.

Palliser laughed. "One to your address, too, old thing, but I'm saying nothing. I ask no questions," and he snorted through his nose, a habit he had of emphasizing a remark which was more emphatic than eloquent.

"He keeps his photographs in a gold-mounted morocco case," Palliser went on, walking to Teddy's bed and looking at the satin eiderdown which covered it like a ball dress on a tramp. "Here they are," he lifted the case from the small table, "laid on the top of his five-guinea py's. I wonder what sort of a face she has? What woman in her senses could be in love with that jackass?"

"Don't touch his things," said Kenny, who had walked to the window. He was always watching for Karl Haff, and no lover ever strained his eyes for a glimpse of his lady with more constant longing. Karl Haff caused his heart to beat like a sledge-hammer a dozen times a day, and his thoughts were with him constantly. He was not attending to Palliser, but was repeating mechanically, "Duisburg, Orsoy, Rheinberg,

Wesel, Xanten, Emmerich, Lobith, Elten, and then Zevenaar," and thinking of the *Ewige Lampe* and Brüderich, who was to be trusted so long as you paid him, and already knew that some evening a Scandinavian sailor was to come into his inn and ask for a bed for a night or two. He thought that he could bind up his chin as though he had toothache, and that if any one noticed him afterwards wearing a beard it would not be so remarkable.

He had got so far away from George Palliser and the inside of Room 24, that it startled him to hear a sound of sudden astonishment from his companion.

"Well, of all the surprises. I say, Kenny, keep your eye on the parade, is every one else out there still?"

"Yes, they're all out there, and if we don't join them there'll be a row. Come on, George," he picked up his cap, "the *Kommandant* may drop in, and there's no use making trouble."

"Look at this, my shorn lamb," said Palliser, holding open the morocco case. "There's a face I remember, and, by Gad, she's as handsome as ever; it's Edith Grey, who went off with Maxie Ransome."

Kenny turned quickly and looked at the picture which Palliser held in his hands. It was Edith; he, too, remembered her, and he stared at the handsome, insolent face.

"Well, if it is, it has nothing to do with either of us," he said. "Put it back; it's not fair, anyhow."

"I knew Edith when she was young and as innocent as she ever was. She was a pretty girl," Palliser said, replacing the case where it had been, and following Kenny out of the door. "It was ages ago, when I was a subaltern, and her father commanded the regiment, five years before I left the service. A bit of a thing with the pride of Satan in her, flirting with everything in trousers she could see. She's about three years

younger than I am, so make no mistake about it, she's rising forty, but she *has* worn well. I wonder why she took a fancy to Harrington? It's the dollars, I suppose."

He was quite excited about his discovery, and he and Kenny walked in the square together as he talked his patchy personal reminiscences over with his friend. After a time he went away to talk to some one else, and Harrington came up to Kenny.

"I can't think how you can stand that bounder," he said acrimoniously, "he gets on my nerves."

"You get on his," replied Kenny shortly, and they walked as far as the football ground together.

Soon they were to get up a team and play matches there, but this prospect aroused no enthusiasm in Teddy, who regarded football as a game for the masses, as he said with contempt.

"Jerry Acton says that it's quite possible to get out," Teddy went on. "I wonder if it is worth trying? In any case, there's my uncle, that tiresome old bore, Radley, and he is working things in London by this. I wish to God I could get out."

"So do I, and so do the others," Kenny said restlessly. He felt angry with Teddy. Prison life seemed to be bringing all his worst side to the surface, and he jarred frequently on Kenny's nerves. Suddenly, and for no special reason, they came to a stand-still and stared at each other, their mutual dislike showing in their eyes.

"Are you still engaged to Elodie St. Hope?" Kenny asked. He had had no letter from her for some weeks, and he wanted desperately to know what had happened.

"What has that got to do with you?" replied Teddy.

"You know very well." Gleeson controlled his voice and spoke very quietly.

"Our engagement has not been broken off," Teddy said, blinking his eyelids. He felt he had got a shot

home all right, and, so far as he knew, Elodie was still nominally his future wife. "Why?"

Kennedy shrugged his shoulders.

"Because I intend to write and ask her to marry me the moment I get out of Crefeld."

"Then you intend to do a damned low-down thing," said Harrington, "it's exactly what I should have expected of you."

He felt a storm of anger rise in him against Gleeson. Not that he cared for Elodie. Had he not written to Edith and sworn undying love in a dozen letters? But, to let Kennedy think that he was free to begin his own campaign was utterly distasteful to him. As well as this, now that he was away from her Teddy felt that to marry Edith was really rather the act of a very young man or a fool. Maxie was still alive, and so long as he was there, and he might be there for ever, the question could not really arise. He could refuse to take Edith away on the ground of scandal and on account of his own future career when he left the army, and, so long as things stood thus, he was not forced to end his engagement.

They seemed to have quarrelled bitterly, and they spoke no more to each other, then, for the fact of imprisonment accentuated everything so much. The unkempt football ground looked bleak against the background of the high, wire-crested wall, and the prisoners were beginning to look listless and tired, for the evening was approaching and another empty day was nearly over. There was nothing to look forward to but a greasy, uninspiring meal, and the disenchantment of the place crept out towards sunset and stared gauntly at them all.

Kennedy turned away; it was beginning to rain, and pretty nearly every man on the parade was thinking of home. They were wondering what London looked like, and hungering for theatres, music, pictures, and restaurants. What did any one guess of the life they

all led? But they kept going—at a cost. Palliser joined Kenny; he guessed that there had been some kind of row between him and Harrington.

The sky to the west was traversed by a hard line of gold, against which the rain fell like a thin curtain, and Palliser's cheerful face wore a weary, baffled look. He had a dread, now and then, of letting himself think of the things they had all been through, and the security of rules and accepted ideas dropped away and left him feeling that he was entombed, and that nothing would ever happen. Being an entirely unsentimental man, he had a horror of expressed emotion, but the personal rages which took hold upon prisoners were familiar to him. Harrington, for instance, always made a definite attempt to humiliate and affront him, and now he had had a row with Kennedy Gleeson. There were fellows there who regarded every man in the place as a foe, and this spirit had a way of running through the rooms like fire.

"Don't fight if you can help it," he said, "it's catching. Compton has been like a savage bull all to-day, and we must keep cheery. If we are all at each other's throats it will mean that there will be trouble, and then the *Kommandant* will hear of it, and God knows what and all."

Kennedy's face relaxed and he laughed. He was ashamed in a way, not so much of what he had said, but of what he had felt towards Harrington.

"It all comes of being cooped up," Palliser went on, "one loses all sense of proportion. Grudges grow as large as giants, and you get to know every other fellow's ways and tricks, and some small thing fastens on one's nerves like a tick on a dog's ear; and sometimes the only fun one has is just to be aggravating. I aggravate Harrington, and he aggravates me, and now you and he have parted brass rags, and Room 24 will be a kind of public bear-garden if we don't watch it. I get a kind of pain somewhere inside of me, not

physical but mental, and one feels as if one was bound up in a maze of their wire. We're all good fellows enough, but we must watch it, Kenny. Bad blood is a mistake."

Kennedy looked at Palliser and wondered at him. He used to think him a kindly materialist, entirely self-indulgent, and getting to a stage in life when he was becoming densely selfish. Now he was showing such a different side to himself, even though he looked dingy and his clothes went totally without any special attention or care. He laughed his cracked, crowing laugh, and he made his jests much as usual, but behind it there was stability and real courage, and Kennedy was abashed by it all. George was simply heroic in the common things of the day, and he went on to tell Kenny that he was trying to get up a "sing-song" for the lads. They had the use of the canteen for that kind of show now and then, and Palliser was a splendid organizer.

Impressed by his own shortcomings, and feeling that George must be backed up, he made it his business to speak to Harrington as though nothing had happened; and Teddy, who felt also that he had hardly behaved well, met his effort at conciliation with a quick response. As well as this, Teddy had heard a rumour that Blessington was down on a list for exchange, and if Blessington, why not he? It improved his temper considerably, and he was even friendly to Palliser, and they all attended the "sing-song."

Kenny listened to Teddy's hopes, and all the basis upon which they were built, and agreed that there was a good chance for him to get away.

"I have often thought of trying to escape," Teddy said, "but it's risky. They tell me that it is next to impossible to get any of the guard to take the chance, because lately there has been a rule made that sends them to the Western Front or the mines, if it is discovered that a man has helped a prisoner to get off."

He applauded a song, during which he had talked all the time in his usual voice.

"Anyhow, if Radley does his best, I ought to be out of this in a month. We will see what happens about Blessington."

"Blessington is dead lame," said Kennedy, "that makes a difference."

"I know," Harrington's voice was discontented. "I suppose I shall have to go sick for a time, but, God, Kenny, I can't face the reserve lazarette, even though it's a lot better than it was."

"You'll have to face something," said Kennedy; "whatever it is, if you want to get out of here."

"I might try the escaping stunt," he said, veering back to his first suggestion, for he never knew what he intended to do.

## CHAPTER XXIII

**A** MONTH later Teddy Harrington made an attempt to escape from the *Husaren Kasernen*. Whom he had bribed, of course, he did not say, but it failed hopelessly. He had evidently hit on Kenny's first idea of going to the dentist's, and he told Gleeson that he could have his things and his parcels, as he was not coming back. He had made friends with the interpreter, a man with a foxy, compromising face, who made a good thing out of small smuggling; he had a hearty and jovial way with him, and went about in great freedom. Both Kennedy and Palliser hated the sight of the man, and decided that he was a spy; but he had lived for years in England and could talk slang like a native. Combined with this, he had a special gift for discovering the prisoners who were likely to be of use to him, financially, and it was not long before he began to pay special attention to Sir Frederick Harrington.

Teddy brightened up so much, once the carefully planned arrangement had been made, that he was, as Palliser said, "the life and soul of the Prison Camp." After a little, the date was fixed, and Teddy went off under escort to the dentist. He was not going to escape uncomfortably, because the idea of sleeping in wet woods and eating turnips from the fields did not appeal to him at all, and the interpreter had a convenient friend who had a motor. The frontier was only fifteen miles away, and that was nothing in a car. Teddy was to be taken across as a chauffeur, driving a rich Dutchman, and it was all perfectly simple.

Kennedy, whose own patience was slowly evaporat-



ing, felt a wild pang of jealousy, which he stifled as best he could, and Teddy told him that the real chauffeur was to be left to walk. It was a costly venture, but he was prepared to pay anything at all for liberty.

That day the corporal of the guard was in a more than usually bad temper, and Kennedy suffered from a number of minor attacks, which he endured with a sense of hopeless wonder as to whether Karl had not been making a fool of him. After all, he had done so very little for the man really, and at times he felt as though the incident in the closed fly had only been a dream. It was three months since it had occurred, and from that time onwards he had not had a sign from Karl Haff. At mid-day, Teddy went away, complaining of his toothache, and the members of Room 24 began to gamble on his chances. Palliser said that Teddy was such a fool that it was most unlikely he would escape; but Compton, who desired to get rid of him at all costs, was inclined to think that if you had money enough it might be done.

"God knows I grudge no man his freedom," he said bitterly, "but it's rather hard to sit here and know that he is getting out merely because he can buy the dirty soul of that interpreter fellow."

A little later the news came that Blessington had got his orders to leave, and that he was to be sent to Switzerland with a batch of surgical cases, and thence to England. Rumour had it that Teddy Harrington's name was down also, and that he was to be permitted to return on parole, through special agency.

"It's just like the damned ass to go off the very day that he might have got out," commented Palliser. "Talk of luck, he has the lost luck of all the rest of us," and he began to hold forth upon the unfairness of such arrangements.

"Just because the blighter has an uncle who is a Cabinet Minister, and relations at Court, he can have

his case ear-marked——” and so the discussion continued.

A little after the mid-day meal, there was a commotion outside, and gradually the news filtered through to the prisoners that Harrington's plan had failed. He had got to the dentist's house, and, while he was waiting for his turn, had managed, as was previously settled, to evade his guard and walk into the street. Once there, he was to get into the waiting motor, and the Dutchman and the change of clothing were to be found in readiness. He was to change his clothes in the car, and in a quiet street he was then to take the driver's seat, while the real chauffeur got down and proceeded on foot.

Teddy had paid for his freedom *in* advance; without the advance, no one would stir hand nor foot; and what actually did happen was, that he wandered along the street, stared at by all the passing crowd, and could see no sign of either the car, the Dutchman, or the interpreter.

As he was by no means devoid of courage and dash, he took a bicycle which was leaning against the window of a shop, and began to ride quietly through the street. He still hoped that the car would pick him up, and that the alarm would not be given too soon. Hastening his pace, he pushed along to the outskirts of Crefeld, and there disaster met him, for he came straight into a marching platoon of troops who were in training in the town. Almost at once he was discovered, though he threw his bicycle down and cleared a low wall. The alarm was given, and Teddy Harrington, in a moment of panic, ran along a narrow path that skirted the river, and ignored the shout of “Halt!” He was flying for his life to some undergrowth where he saw a chance of safety. Then the officer in charge of the platoon fired, and Teddy tumbled over like a shot rabbit.

He hadn't been killed, Urlaub, who recounted the

story to Kennedy, assured him of that, but his ankle had been fractured, and he was now an inmate of the *Lehrerseminar*. They were all sorry about it in Room 24, for, even though they had felt that his escape had been a little too highly gilded to be really sporting, Teddy had come out of it well, and they considered that it was extraordinarily bad luck that he should have missed everything, all at once.

His place was taken by a gloomy Major of Engineers, who never smiled; and, for such is the way of human feeling, they often wished that Harrington was back again, with his gorgeous parcels and his hair wash.

The corporal of the guard caught Kennedy's eye as he went round the rooms that night, which he did once a week when the house porter had an evening out. Obviously Karl Haff was distressed, and he turned his eyes to the ceiling as though in prayer.

Teddy's attempt at escape was visited upon Room 24 more stringently than upon the others, and they were deprived of cards and their usual exercise, as well as of cigarettes and a week's mail. It was customary, so no one complained, and at the end of a week Falliser got his gramophone back.

As the weather grew colder, the long-promised arrangement that prisoners were to be allowed to use the football grounds came about, and Kenny played for his block. He was beginning to grow hopeless, and all his dreams only taunted him like ghostly, mocking shadows. The days wore on, and still, though he searched his mail with the same eagerness each time the bundle of letters was given to him, he never found the envelope which he had handed over to Karl Haff. They had heard nothing more of Teddy, except that his ankle had been very badly broken, and that quite possibly he might lose his foot. Elodie had explained to Kenny why it was that she had not definitely ended

her engagement. She said that Teddy had not been able to come and see her, and that when the news arrived that he was missing, she had thought he might have been killed.

"I felt very sorry, Ken, because, after all, I should never have got engaged to him, and then, when we heard that he was actually a prisoner, it seemed impossible to make things worse than they were. You understand, don't you, how I felt?"

Kenny thought of Edith Ransome's photograph, and his eyes hardened.

"I don't often hear from Ted, and it is strange beyond words that you and he should be together, but I do write now and then, as we really only send each other the most ordinary letters. It will be easy, once it is all over."

Kenny was utterly dissatisfied. He saw Elodie's point of view, but it was not very easy to bear. She felt that while a man was closed in and cut off from everything he wanted, it was cruel to deprive him of any kind of hope or happiness which still remained. Teddy was a prisoner of war, and until he was free she could not find it in her heart to put an end to things between them. It would be hitting a man when he was down, and she had not the least idea that he was thinking of some one else. If only Teddy could be induced to clear the thing up himself, but who was to make him do so?

Kenny felt he could tell her nothing, and during the moments of expansion, when Harrington thought he was all but a free man, he had confided to Kenny that he hadn't really played the game quite squarely. At that time he was thinking of Edith, and he knew that it was to her that he desired to return, but he had spoken under the seal of confidence, and Kenny could do nothing.

The month of October had come, with storms of rain and golden showers of falling leaves. The creeper

over the *Kommandant's* house had turned a gorgeous rose-red, and the days were cold, with a bite in the air. Every one was to be there for another winter, at least, and there was no real hope of any exchange of fit men.

Palliser said he was expecting to be buried in the churchyard near the Barracks, and had chosen a nice sheltered corner for his grave. Probably the grandchildren of Compton would eventually get there with a victorious army and subscribe towards a monument. It seemed as though already the young life of England was drifting to the same bourne, and the gloomy Engineer Major discovered a nephew, whom he had last seen in petticoats, in a further block along the square.

Kennedy threw himself into games with a kind of savage vitality; it made one sleep at night and forget the litany which began with "Duisburg, Orsoy, Rheinberg," and went on into a dream which seemed no whit nearer to realization.

It was in the middle of October that a fresh batch of lists of killed and wounded were being read aloud by Compton, and Palliser was sitting near the fire, for he was suffering from a cold which never got any better, and among the names Compton read out, "Ransome, Major M. H. K., Hussars."

"Wounded?" asked Palliser. "By Gad, it's quite refreshing to hear a name one knows these days."

"No, killed," said Compton morosely; he was not in the mood to make jokes about the casualty list.

When Kenny came in, mud-stained, and feeling very much better, he was greeted with the news by George Palliser.

"Ransome has gone west," he said; "so there's a chance for Harrington. I wonder will he like the look of it, now that it is actually there for him. What?"

Kennedy said very little. He remembered Maxie's long talk about the polo team, and how he had been badly treated, and now Maxie was beyond the stars,

and if he ever played polo again it would only be on mystical ponies. It is very hard to imagine some people in spiritual surroundings: they live like summer insects, following round and round in gay circles of life, and the trouble is, to think of anywhere where they could be happy except here, and in the world of men and streets, playing-grounds, and voices. There are others who, obviously, never belong really to the world at all, and who cannot be got to take it seriously, because it is so much of an illusion in their eyes. You know them when you look at them, and their arrival on earth is always a little suggestive of Persephone's descent into the Kingdom of Death. Strange airs blow round them, and they stir the hearts of others with dimly comprehended feelings. The rest of the world appears to be alive and interested, but a question comes to us when these others pass us by, and faint longings for something which is not here and never has been here. They are troublesome people, for their ways are not our ways, and they cannot understand the heavy weight of life, but they do not dance in the midge circles, and they evade us and escape.

Ransome never hit his head against the stars, and he had known only one great passion in his life, his love for Edith. He had known her as she was, and had still loved her every bit as well. With all his jealous rages he had never been a cynic, and, in a way, he was wonderfully faithful to a main ideal. Now he was dead, and Edith could do whatever it was that she wanted to do, and her wayward, restless soul was free to undertake some fresh adventure. Kenny did not really think very much about it, except in so far as he wondered what Maxie would do without ponies and fishing and shooting. He did not convey the idea of being altogether ready for a life in which these things played no part, but, after all, God had made the queer jumble, and probably had not forgotten to

provide for subsequent results which had to follow upon the little moment when Death reached out a hand and snatched a soul from a body. Whether you believed in God or did not believe in Him, and whether you regarded Him as a friend or a foe, you had to leave things in His hands, once it came to the last of life.

There was no use speculating, for every one would have an answer to these questions sooner or later. Palliser had a varied assortment of reminiscences about several of the other names in the lists, and they talked intermittently about one and another; and the gloomy Major said that soon every one would be dead, which pleased George Palliser very much indeed.

The evening wore away, and followed so many other evenings into the limbo of past things, and Kennedy went to bed weary and rather depressed, but he never showed what he felt, and he played up to George and ragged the Engineer Major, his blue eyes full of laughter. He had come to feel that George was a heroic soul, and he admired him, with continual astonishment at his courage, and he took his own turn at routing the depression of the place and doing what he could to keep going. As for death, there was no kind of use in worrying about it, and to lie awake and wonder through what dizzy void of space Maxie Ransome might be travelling was futile.

The gramophone sung of lost joys, and jolted over cracks with an admirable determination, and when Kenny went to bed he felt as though things were really going on like this for ever and for ever. He was of little faith that night, and he thought Karl Haff was an impostor "trying it on" with him, or perhaps a foolish sentimentalist, who wanted to do something but had not the brains or courage to see how it should be done. Some one had sent Gleeson a book, in which there was the story of the "Pragmatist," who, himself quite uneasy and not at all convinced about anything,

had, out of the force of circumstances, to pretend he was happy because of the others, and he had promised himself to allow the true state of affairs to appear when the time came for him to quit this mortal coil. But when the time came, and he saw the anxious faces gathered around his bed, he knew that he must still continue as he had always been, and so the Pragmatist died "uttering cries of joy." Pragmatists were, then, the only people whom one could really respect, and Kenny had uttered his own cries of joy all the evening, until he was utterly tired out by it.

But when he got into bed, his heart beat like a sledge-hammer. His bed was by no means soft at the best of times, and now he was aware that there was a foreign body among the straw and papers with which it was stuffed. The parcel which contained the serge suit and the shirt was actually there, under him, and he knew this was the first sign that the time of escape was nearing him at last.



## CHAPTER XXIV

**I**T was very hard for Elodie St. Hope to bear with her own special trouble in life. She was in an invidious position, and Lady Gertrude, who had come to London to stay indefinitely, reminded her perpetually that she was engaged to her son.

Lady Gertrude had not a light touch, and she leaned heavily on any subject which occupied her. She was working feverishly to get Teddy out of Germany, and since his ankle had been broken and he was now a surgical case, it became quite possible that this could be done. Lord Radley was worn to a shadow by her importuning, and though he hated having to do anything for any one, he was forced to take a personal interest in his nephew. Whenever Elodie went to see her, she felt as though the world was plunged in gloom, for Lady Gertrude could take the gilt off any known gingerbread, and was very lugubrious and discouraging about everything except Teddy's repatriation. She pulled strings with unceasing violence, and went from one to another of her relations and forced them into action. They hated the sight of her, but they could not stand her attack, and melted away before it, promising impossibilities, which they then found themselves pledged to perform.

Elodie found herself called upon urgently to go and see Lady Gertrude one cold November afternoon; and she went out, wrapped to her ears in furs, and feeling more than usually reluctant. Lady Gertrude lived in a small house in Hill Street, where, for no particular reason, she practised rigid economy, so that the house within was usually colder than the streets outside, and Lady Gertrude herself more icy than either.

When she set out, Elodie had not really thought of having a straight talk with Teddy's mother, but the wind was due east, and she was ruffled and irritated. Letters from Kenny had ceased altogether, and she had come to the point where the last straw was very likely to bring about a toppling crash around Lady Gertrude's ears. Teddy's mother was not aware of this, and she had good news, so that her own face was wreathed in smiles when Elodie came into the bleak drawing-room, where a small handful of fire threw out an entirely insufficient amount of heat.

Lady Gertrude sat at her writing-table, looking stiff and unapproachable, a widow's cap on her head, and a photograph of Sir James Monroe Harrington on the table at her elbow. She had now adopted the fiction that she had adored her husband, and that their married life, which had been in reality a series of storms of dispute, had resembled that of the late Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort. Piety exuded from her, for she had become very religious. Elodie received her frosty kiss with a corner of her own warm face, and wondered if any one had ever called Teddy's mother "Gerty." She smiled at the idea, and sat down on a small chair formed of geometrical angles, and prepared to listen to the latest record of persecutions of the Great, to which Lady Gertrude's life was now entirely devoted.

"At last, Elodie, at last;" Lady Gertrude spoke like a Prime Minister who has carried off a *coup*, and took up a letter from a pile on the table. "It is actually arranged, and Teddy, who has been in a place called the —," she paused and put on her glasses, "called the *Lehrerseminar*, is to be sent home to England this week."

"The *Lehrerseminar*," Elodie repeated the name.

"Of course it is an exceptional case," went on Lady Gertrude with a kind of bow to her own powers, "but it *has* been done."

"I am very glad," said Elodie. "Poor old Ted, he will be thankful." She flushed, and her eyes brightened, not with the light of love, but with the light of expectant battle, for she realized that the issues were to be joined.

"There will be now no reason why the marriage should not take place at once," continued Lady Gertrude; "in fact, I spoke to Radley about it only this morning, and he said, 'The sooner the better'; yes, *he* said, 'The sooner the better.'"

"I am afraid I hardly see what he has to do with it," said Elodie, unable to keep the sound of a retort out of her voice.

Lady Gertrude looked up, as though some small animal had stung her, and she was both surprised and affronted.

"My dear child, Lord Radley is the head of the family. Surely you are aware of that?"

If she was not aware of it, Elodie could not plead as a reason that she had not frequently been told so.

"There seems very little use," she said, and her soft voice rang with all the sense of her own pent-up feelings, "now that Teddy is coming home, to keep up the pretence any longer."

Lady Gertrude cleared her throat and stared at Elodie with a flat, brassy smile.

"Forgive me, if I say that I hardly know to what you allude," she said, with terrific politeness. "What 'pretence' do you refer to?"

Elodie began to play with her gloves. She was slightly agitated in spite of herself, and Lady Gertrude looked very awful despite or perhaps on account of her smile. She spoke suddenly, to the human being which she believed might be hidden under the folds of the flowing black dress, or have its abode somewhere under the smooth-parted front, or the widow's cap.

"It is really no use, Cousin Gertrude," she said

earnestly; "from the beginning Teddy and I have never really loved each other, but I kept on because at first he was at the war, and then he was a prisoner. I don't think I could well have done otherwise. Now that Teddy is at the end of all his troubles there is no more need for it, and so I am telling you at once that I shall not marry him."

Lady Gertrude stared at Elodie as though she were under the influence of drink. She had never in all her life so sorely regretted that it was not *convenable* to smack people on the face. Under like circumstances Queen Elizabeth might have done so, and sworn fine round oaths at the same time, but not Queen Victoria, so she swallowed down her wrath. She did not care a pin for Elodie, but she was always shadowed by her fears for Teddy, and they rose like a mighty host as Elodie's clear voice pronounced her decision in no hesitating tones. Teddy was now free in many senses: if he so desired, he could marry a beggar maid, like that ridiculous King Cophetua, who owed his fame to the fact that he had acted upon a foolish impulse, and she could only look on and do nothing. Teddy was sure to return in a mood for love, if his mother knew anything about him, and the ordinary dangers were likely to be increased a thousandfold. She disliked Elodie intensely at the moment, but she brought her heavy tactfulness to bear upon the situation, and trampled on in felt-clad feet.

"Elodie, you cannot mean what you say. Some one has been influencing you against your better judgment"—Lady Gertrude never gave any one under forty credit for acting upon their own initiative; "you cannot really expect me to believe that you intend to break my son's heart. To do so, after all his sufferings," she closed her eyes as though in prayer, "would be an act so heartless and devoid of principle, that I will not believe you are capable of such baseness."

"I don't see that it is base," Elodie said, appealing

to the imaginary Lady Gertrude, who she still faintly hoped had some existence. "There is nothing the least unusual in breaking off an engagement, and though I have never actually told Teddy, it will be no surprise to him."

"I forbid you," said Lady Gertrude majestically; "I totally forbid you to take any such step. The engagement has been announced. All our friends know of it, and to take such a step might be"—she paused and adjusted her glasses—"very unpleasant for you. Even in these days there are people who, and I thank God for it, have some right feeling left, and who would not hesitate to show you what *they* thought."

Elodie got up and walked to the miserable fire. It was, after all, very like the soul of its proprietor—made up of dust and cinders, and knew nothing of leaping flames.

"What other people say does not matter," she said slowly; "it is only a question for Teddy and for me. I don't love him, and I don't believe he loves me."

Lady Gertrude became rhetorical. She spoke of Teddy "risking his life in the trenches," a place where he had never really been for more than a few brief minutes; of his distinguished bravery and his long imprisonment.

"Do you not realize that he has *fought* for us, and that he is coming home wounded?"

"I thought he was wounded when he was trying to escape," Elodie remarked, for her temper was beginning to rise.

Lady Gertrude coughed again, and laid her hands on her blotting-pad. She felt that the situation was both ridiculous and desperate: it was as though the wind had blown her cap off, or a small street dog had worried her virtuous petticoats; you could do nothing in either case but strive to retain dignity.

"I cannot believe that you mean this. It pains me

indescribably," she said. "But there is one question which I think it is right I should put to you. Have you, in Teddy's absence, been involving yourself in some foolish affair which has momentarily blinded your judgment?"

"What I have done, or what I may do, is really not the subject we appear to be talking of," Elodie said quietly. She felt totally indifferent to Lady Gertrude. "I have decided all this long ago, and it would have been ended before the war broke out, only that I waited for a little, and then Teddy went to France."

"I cannot permit you to make all this nonsense public," said Lady Gertrude, with an air of finality. "You tell me that you have changed your mind, owing probably to some foolish flirtation, but until Teddy himself returns, I cannot regard what you have said as authorized. You have decided to make his homecoming a sad one, and I leave that question to your own conscience, but you owe it to him to keep silence until then. I conclude that you have not been airing your ideas on affairs which, I may point out to you, are not entirely your own."

"I will tell Teddy," Elodie said, walking to the door, "and, as you ask it, I will not put any announcement in the paper until then. I had not thought of doing so. But once I have seen him I shall not wait."

She left the room without saying anything further, and Lady Gertrude rang up Lord Radley, who told his secretary to say that he was out.

"That woman will be the death of me," he added plaintively. "I wonder that James stood it so long, but *he* had a fine constitution."

Elodie, having had it out with Teddy's mother, felt considerably cheered in spirit. She carried her trouble of mind about Kennedy with real courage, and she tried to persuade herself that all was well. From time to time letters took an unusually long while in

coming, and before this she had been weeks without news. She was leading a life of imagination, bound in with the other life, and quite unrelated to the normal existence of her days, and her longing for Kennedy clothed itself in a hundred different forms of expression. She loitered by a book shop and chose his favourite books for him, and then she gathered up the blossoms from a florist's window and presented them all to him. She chose a flat for them while they were in London, and recalled the dear remembered outlines of Castle Glenfield, where they would be for most of the year, unless they travelled abroad. Teddy's ring had long been put away in her jewel-box, and the little green circlet was now dry and yellow, and so brittle that it had to be kept like a relic, closed away from the air, in a crystal box all to itself.

She led her present life, much as many people go on talking, to keep the terrors of silence or reality well at bay. There were terrifying thoughts which lurked in the silence, and which sprang upon her sometimes when she was alone. She knew nothing of what Kennedy's life really was, and at times a word or a phrase in his letters seemed to hint at possibilities which made her very soul turn chill. She tried to believe that she was glad he was a prisoner, and, consequently, safe; but the account of Teddy's attempt at escape, which had come to Lady Gertrude from a neutral source, gave her a sense of fear which it took all her powers of control to hold in check. If Teddy had attempted to escape and run the risk of being shot, it was ten thousand times more than likely that Kenny, with all his hatred of confinement and being shut in, would do the same some day, when the tension was all too great to endure. It was all so cruel. He and she owned such a beautiful and gracious possession, and it was theirs, and yet they could not take it and enter into their kingdom; they might look at it wistfully, he from behind the walls of a prison, and she from out of the

comfort and liberty of her own life, but they were starving. The pain of it all pressed down upon her again, and she wandered along the streets. Hil was not likely to be back for hours, and she had nowhere that she wished to go in her present mood.

Was it to go on like this for unlimited time, and until poor weary Youth flitted away with the ribbons and music, and left no trace of itself behind? The wonderful sweet flutterings of the heart, and the madness and gladness of it all; was all that to be wasted and thrown away? No one knew when the prisoners would be released, no one knew whether they would be there until the war was over, and no one knew when the war was going to end. And still one had to go on; one didn't scream aloud or exhibit the fact that one's heart was loaded with lead.

Hilda understood, because, in spite of Larry's returns on leave, which Elodie suspected were disappointing in some vague way, she, too, was living under the dominion of fear. She and Larry were going back to Ireland for their next leave, and she seemed to hope great things from that. One always hoped great things, and kept up the pretence all the time. But, oh, how sick one got of it!

They had walked along such happy paths together, and now she might only return there in memory, for they were being cheated of their youth, Kenny and she; and she conjured up the picture of his face and the strong light blue of his eyes. To think of him in the dingy grey life which was his, the sinister sense of it close around him, made her strain across the distance, crying his name in her heart. She wanted him so; she wanted nothing in the world except to see him back again, and that might never be. He might be ill and uncomforted, he might suffer many things, and she not know, and the tempest of feeling which held her rose as she walked on across the Park.

It was as though her shoulders were bent by the



weight of all the sorrows of absence and distance, and yet neither he nor she were to blame for all that was so hopelessly wrong with the world. To give him up because he had to fight, and let him go, if it had to be, to his death out there, in battle, these things she could have done; but to know that he was shut away in an awful, tiny grave, was more than could be borne without complaint. Yet she did not complain. Elodie knew that there is no use to tear the skies with impatient prayers, for what has to be borne must be borne. How many years was she to walk alone? Youth gone and middle-age come, and then other years which she could not yet comprehend if Kenny did not come back. What were those awful stories she had heard of systematic cruelty, and of how plague ran through a camp, permitted and unchecked?

The cold wind blew against her, and she went on in a kind of dream. It was no new dream to her, but one the winding of whose dreary labyrinths she knew only too well. She had wandered there for hours and hours, forgetting everything else, until she felt as though she and Kenny were like two wan ghosts who haunted places they both knew, unable, through some curse laid upon them, to look in each other's eyes.

At last she sat down on a seat to rest, for she felt tired. A few leaves were hanging on the trees, and there were eddies of brown leaves tearing along the paths, and everywhere the subtle smell of decay. The beauty of the afternoon sunshine did not exist for Elodie, and the sadness of the desolate Park was almost more than she could bear. Nowhere could she find any refuge from her own thoughts, and the pale blue sky looked as hopelessly far from her as any end to the story. She felt as though she was peering with finite eyes into Eternity, and that the great blinding future, touched with the light of immortality, had nothing to offer her of hope. She was discouraged, and it was as though, deep down somewhere in her

heart, hope was dying like a pale little taper in an airless room. Some force, fatal in its awful power, was seizing her and Kenny, and though she denied it and tried to hide her face from it, she felt that it was stronger than they. All their wonderful love was to pass out into utter nothingness, while they walked their lonely ways, parted by the cruelty of life. The little dead leaves whispered and rustled around her feet, and a drop of rain fell on her hands; even the birds were depressed and out of spirits, because the world was a cold place, devoid of love.

At length she got up and decided to return home; Hil would be back, and there was always comfort in that thought.

As she walked through the high gates, going towards Knightsbridge, she came face to face with Edith Ransome. Edith was wearing black, and Elodie remembered that Maxie had been killed. She stopped impulsively, for she was full of sympathy for any one in sorrow, and Edith looked at her, with her fine, hard eyes.

"Are you doing anything special?" she asked.

"No," said Elodie, "I was going back to the flat for tea."

"Then come and have tea with me instead," said Edith, in a curiously uncordial voice; but as she had asked her, Elodie decided not to refuse. It was rather inexplicable, and she hardly knew why she went. Edith fascinated her certainly, but then Edith fascinated everybody, even when they hated her—and there were many who did.

## CHAPTER XXV

**E**LODIE followed Edith into the blue brocaded room, and looked around her. It was full of flowers, and Edith's tall figure made a strange dark contrast to all its light and colour. She had hardly spoken all the time while they drove together in a taxi to St. James's Court, and still they were both of them silent.

Maxie's photograph had vanished, and on the mantelpiece there was a small snapshot of Teddy in a tiny ivory frame. It caught Elodie's eye at once, and she recalled the incident of Chubbs and the spills. Was it really the case that Teddy loved Edith? She looked at her, and admitted that Edith was certainly distinctive enough to make any man love her.

She was taking off her wide hat with its long black veil, and she smiled slowly as she saw that Elodie had recognized Teddy amid the other spoils of the chase. Then Edith rang for tea, and still the almost uncanny silence held, until it was brought in and they were alone.

"Do you want to marry Teddy Harrington?" Edith asked abruptly; she was looking at Elodie with a close, scrutinizing glance, and her former attitude of hardly being aware of her existence had gone. Elodie felt that she was catching a glimpse of the Edith whom men knew, and it overcame her prejudice. She knew when to cast away subtlety and become entirely honest, and one of these moments was with her now.

Elodie shook her head.

"I have been discussing the question to-day with Lady Gertrude," she said, looking down at her tea-

cup. "For a long time I have wanted to break it off."

"I can tell you why," said Edith, in the same tone; "you are in love with Kenny Gleeson."

"Yes, I am," Elodie replied; "I wonder how you knew."

Edith got up from the tea-table and sat down at a little distance off. She took a cigarette from a box and lighted it and seemed to have forgotten her tea, which she had hardly touched.

"I know, because I understood when I saw him, that he was the type of man whom any woman who had an ounce of discernment would fall in love with. With all his gentleness, and that shy, quick smile, he is so definite." She paused again, and spoke sharply. "Well, does he love you? I thought that he did."

"Yes," said Elodie, and she felt a wild longing to burst into tears. Edith was bringing a sense of drama into the room, and it touched her like an electric wire.

"And still you kept up this shallow pretence," went on Edith. "You knew that you had everything, and you chose to let the world assume that you were to be Teddy Harrington's wife." She flung the words at her with a touch of utter scorn.

Elodie flushed quickly. She had no intention of letting Edith rebuke and condemn her without replying to the charge.

"That isn't fair," she said quickly. "I was engaged to Teddy when I met Ken, and after that there was always a reason why I could not speak. Now all the reasons are ended, for Teddy is coming home again, and I am able at last to finish the whole thing."

"I know he is coming home," Edith said, raising her proud eyes and looking at Elodie, "I heard of it first of all."

Elodie looked back at her.

"Because he loves you really?" she asked. "Oh, I am glad, but why didn't either he or you tell me

before?" She broke off, for she remembered Maxie. "Of course, I understand, please forgive me."

Mrs. Ransome glanced at her own clothes, and drew her flexible mouth into a tight line.

"You are thinking of Maxie?" she said.

"Yes, I was thinking of him."

"And supposing I told you the truth," said Edith, bending forward a little, "what would you say? You know nothing whatever of life, and you never will—not of life as I know it, because you have found everything to start with." She pushed back her hair from her fine forehead, and her eyes looked as though they saw things far away from her. Her look was so intent, and at the same time so tragic and even mournful that her whole face was changed and illuminated by the tensivity of her own feeling.

"I have lived through a whirlpool of love," she went on, "and all of it has meant so hopelessly little. Can you understand, you child? If one can forget things in this life as utterly as one does, why should they be remembered in the next?" Again she broke off, and, after a silence, went on again. "When I was going through Maxie's letters and papers I found a letter of my own, written to him just before I left Hayward, and I read it as though it were the letter of a stranger. Yet I had written it, and at the time I believed all I said." She got up restlessly and bent over the fire. "I said that I would love him for ever and ever, and that I cared for nothing else except to be with him." She laughed noiselessly and held out her beautiful hands to the blaze. "And when I got the wire saying that he had been killed it was just the same as though I had heard of the death of some one I hardly knew. I suppose it was utterly heartless, but that is the truth."

Elodie watched her and made no attempt to speak.

"After that I suddenly felt sick of life. I couldn't

care. One of his brother officers, a man who used to come to the house to see me, came and told me the details, and it broke me down. I cried for days and nights, but I wasn't crying for Maxie; if he had come back I should have hated him. When Teddy was here before he was taken prisoner I told him that I would marry him if Maxie was killed—I cared as little as that. It didn't seem unnatural, and the real truth is that I have never loved any one, except, perhaps, myself." She looked over her shoulder at Elodie reflectively. "I have never cared for any one else, and it is a bad mistake."

"Then you don't really love Teddy?" Elodie asked slowly.

"How could I, how could any one, except the type of woman who is content with nothing? I shall marry him because I have other reasons. He is very rich, for one thing, and there will be no special fervour expected from me. Teddy doesn't require anything but managing, and I can do that." She laughed the same strange laugh again, and went back to the sofa.

"Sometimes the world seems crowded with the faces of these men," she went on, "and I've never given a straight, clear love to any one of them. I like hosannas, and I want them; days are dull without, but I don't pretend to myself, now, that I look back, and I see that once you begin as I did, you go on until there is no reality anywhere."

"But you did love Maxie?" Elodie said, at a loss for words, and, seizing upon anything that sounded like comfort.

"Did I? Ten years ago? I got used to him, and it all went away. I was looking at the new men I met a month after I had been married to him, and wondering which of them would awaken any kind of fire in me again. Yes, I was, I can remember it still. What is it?" she asked, searching Elodie's face with her

eyes wide, "what is it which makes one like this?"

Elodie got up and knelt at her feet, taking her hands in hers.

"It is so dreadfully sad," she said, her young body quivering a little at the stress of Edith Ransome's own emotion.

Edith leaned back against a soft cushion, and let her hands lie between Elodie's.

"You are a nice child," she said, with a tiny smile. "I was jealous of your youth, and something about you which made me feel that you had got hold of something sure and firm. If you ever had a house at all you would build it on a rock, wouldn't you, Elodie St. Hope?"

"Should I?" Elodie hesitated. "I seem to have been very stupid about things."

"When I saw Kennedy Gleeson," Edith continued, speaking quickly, "I knew that out of all the rag-bag of things I had at last put out my hand and touched reality. He stands, as you know, for something above all littleness, and one doesn't forget his eyes. If he had cared for me I could have flung away every other consideration, and I think I could, after a time, have grown up nearer to the place where he stands. Care for him?"—her voice rang out like a challenge,—"*care?* I would have died for him, but I thought he must be like the rest, behind that quiet way he has. I only bored him," she shrugged her shoulders, "oh, yes, quite obviously. He wasn't the kind of man to hang about after some one else's wife, but I didn't understand that either. I began the old way, and he pretended not to see. I think that he wanted to believe that I wasn't as much of a rotter as I implied. Anyhow, Elodie, you had come first, and I don't suppose the man who loves you would really care for me." She smiled again, and touched Elodie's bright hair. "I am for the sophisticated, and Kenny—Kenny is like a boy. No man can smile like that at his age who

has tried the taste of too many of the trees of the garden.

"I love him," Elodie said, "and I know what you mean."

"Teddy and I had been lovers," she gave a short, jeering laugh at the word, "and I ended it all at once. I ended everything, for a bit. I was like Jack Falstaff, who gave up sack and lived clean, but it didn't last very long. It's dull to reform for the sake of some one who neither knows nor cares whether you are an angel or a devil, and then the war came, and Maxie was worse than before. He thought he might be killed and he wanted a son. It is a kind of epidemic that attacks men at such a time." She held out the cigarettes to Elodie, who lighted one, hardly knowing what she was doing.

"Men who had never thought of anything except keeping all their money to spend on themselves and on women, their wives, or others, immediately talked of a nursery, and we were all supposed to be enchanted at the prospect." Her eyes filled with sudden tears. "I could have done it when he took me away from Hayward, but we weren't rich then, and we decided that a car would be more fun. A car, Elodie! Would you rather have a car or a little thing that looked like Kenny about the eyes and mouth?"

Elodie dropped her cigarette into the grate, and watched the fire.

"Of course I wouldn't hear of it, and Maxie and I parted that time in a kind of fury of rage with each other. I wonder why I am telling you all this?" she asked, but Elodie did not turn her head. "When he had gone I was thankful. There was some peace. I hadn't to lie about the letters I got, or keep them locked up so that he couldn't find them, for though at first he would not have dreamed of reading my letters, in the end he did. It was because he couldn't trust me a yard."



"Don't," said Elodie pleadingly. The awful self-revelation of Edith's story was unendurable.

"I got free, you see," explained Edith, "and then Kingsway came and took over the temporary reserve depot, and he had a reputation of his own. Not the sort of thing to be very proud of if you count honour and faithfulness and all that, but it made him attractive to me. It was like playing with the electric light, and really it didn't amuse me, but I *had* to make him care, and he did care for a few months. After that, we both wondered what it had all been about, I think. I know I did, and I was angry with him because he did. He will reform when he is married, and be fearfully down on other men who play his own game." She shivered as though she felt cold.

"It was then that, quite by chance, I met Teddy, who had come up to London to see you. I didn't care a bit about you, and anyhow, I thought you were a sordid little fool who wanted to marry money. Any one would have thought so, don't you agree?"

"I never saw it like that," said Elodie, hurt to the heart. "Surely you *couldn't* think I was quite so mean?"

"I did think so, because it was my own idea, but in my case I hadn't got Kenny Gleeson—you had, so I took the liberty of despising you thoroughly and counting you out." Edith's voice was returning to its more normal tone of discontent.

"I took him off here, and the rest was very easy. Would you like to know how he spent the evening that was to have been yours? He sat here, on this sofa, and asked me to marry him directly Maxie got out of the light. Now, do you see what a fool you have been? Oh, my God, what a fool."

"I was a fool," Elodie admitted, and it did not occur to her to urge that at least her special folly had the stamp of faith upon it. She had not thought of

herself, and she had only waited until her own sense of fairness would let her act.

"Since then he has written to me pretty often," went on Edith; "and when he comes back he will hang things up and wonder which of us he really wants. As soon as he knows that you are in love with Kennedy he will want you, and now that I am free he will remember the kind of things which every one will say. When it is known that he is to marry me people will dig up Hayward's divorce, they will remember that there were others who might have figured in it with Maxie, they will say that all the time Teddy and I were watching the casualty list, so as to be free. He will know all this, Elodie, and you can hardly wonder if he gets frightened. On the other hand, there is you," she put her hands on Elodie's shoulders and looked at her fixedly. "He could feel very sure of you, and his friends will tell him that I am not to be trusted. I must have a score of lovers, and no man quite likes the idea."

"But if he loves you," Elodie began desperately; she felt distracted by the whole story.

"He can't love any one; he is like me, perhaps," she laughed. "But he will marry me for all that. It's not much of a recompense, and nothing to be proud of, but I've lost all the rest, so I intend to be comfortable. Glenfallow is a nice old house, and Teddy will forget that he was nervous about the County——"

Without saying anything else she suddenly turned and buried her face in her arms and lay quite still. She was not crying; she seemed to have got past the possibility of any such relief, for she had conjured up all the hopeless emptiness of her life, its gilded failure and its nakedness, until she could bear the sight of it all no longer.

"Don't you think that you and Teddy could find something better, a *real* happiness?" Elodie asked.

"Couldn't you keep friends with yourself and him?"

Edith made no answer. She was far away from Elodie, in a place where she could not follow her. Like many others she had suffered herself to be concerned about the things that did not count, and the chances of poverty and the promise of adventure which required bravery and self-sacrifice had never appealed to her, nor did they now. She wanted everything, and even when she had said that she could have given Kenny a great love, she may have guessed that it was probably not actually true. The torrent of the years had swept her away from any sure foundation, and she had so played with the big events that she had now no realms left to her, nothing but empty conquests piled each upon each. She could not even follow her own sudden glimpses of vision, for she faltered and failed and lay prone on her down cushions.

"It is because Teddy and I have forgotten how to be simple," she said in a stifled voice. "We don't know how to use our own experience, and we have no real principle. . . . Would one find it again inside a church, do you think? . . . We haven't even a philosophy, and it's all very poor."

Elodie bent down and kissed her, as she raised her white face.

"I suppose we are all very poor," she said, standing erect and lifting her chin a little, as though she was addressing some power unseen to either of them. "I know that one gets tired, and that there is always the fight, whether one is tired or not. We are missing so much, compared to the men, because, for them there is always the excitement of going to *do* things—except," and her eyes clouded—"for the prisoners. One wants to crowd everything into these years, and one forgets all about Eternity."

"What have egoists to do with Eternity?" Edith said, sitting up and holding out her hand to Elodie.

"Well, Elodie, so we part, and I shall not see you again until I have lost all this wretched mood. It will go—everything goes, and I shall think of the little things once more, and say that they are all that matter."

Elodie went out of the narrow little square and on into Buckingham Gate. She had been torn and tossed by the impetus of Edith's wretchedness, and the cynical truth of all she had found to say of herself. She had had adventure in her life, but yet to call her experiences "adventures" was to rob the word of its essential charm. To be in the thick of things, and to live intensely was a different matter than to stand in a shower of scented limelight, juggling with coloured balls. You might as well compare the flight of a wild swan to the ramblings of a duck along a garden path in search of slugs, though Edith, who had chosen the slugs and the garden path, was clad in the feathers of a swan—and she had never used her wings.

Elodie wondered over it as she walked back quickly, for the time had passed and it was late. If Edith had begun differently, if she had been surrounded by the wonderful open spaces and covered by the wide skies which both she and Hilda had known, perhaps she might have escaped from the gilded vanity. Kenny had the freedom which Teddy had missed, and he had always regarded life as a thing to be dashingly attempted and used; there was wild-fire about him, and others took light at his coming. But certainly you needed a faith, Edith had been right about that. The sort of faith which sustained men who had gone blind in the war, and people who had to face lifelong loneliness and disappointment. You might never really defeat a man who had faith, and without it there was so little else to lean upon; and her thoughts drifted on as she called him back and back to her heart.

Her own faith had been cold, earlier in the after-

noon, as she sat in the Park alone, but it returned to her just as though Kennedy had warmed and cherished it near his heart. Some day he would come back to her, and she felt that he would come in his own headlong fashion, and they would go again to Castle Glenfield, and walk down through the meadow and sit in the little clearing below Adrigole, where the water talked to itself and told stories to the pine trees. They *must* be the same. She implored fate for this, as she thought of it. All the wide, wandering fortunes of life which would intervene could make no difference to him and her. Edith had said that every one changed and forgot, and that in the span of one life you left a whole graveyard of dead loves behind you. She raised her face to the clear yellow of the evening sky, and looked at the stars just beginning to awaken in the frosty primrose now dying slowly into night.

Surely all the chivalry of men's dreams, and the brave things they had done were not so easily forgotten and put away? Surely this phantom world where Edith had wasted her fine personality and thrown away and squandered her gold was not to be recognized as having any real value. No, a thousand times no; she would not admit it. There was open country and the beauty of clean, green things, the vital, aspiring spirit of life. Somewhere, a little further on in the unknown journey, she thought that she and all the others would reach the brave little hill-top from where each one saw the outline of the desired country. Hil used to look across to Adrigole when the moon was high, and think that the gold roofs of heaven would compare rather badly to it; she had told her that once, and Elodie remembered it. She was aching for Castle Glenfield and the white lady on the staircase; she wanted to hear the distant sound of the hounds in the Adrigole kennels sending an occasional greeting to the night. There were so many precious sounds which belonged to the place; the clink of the

forge at the cross-roads, and the rattle of the bread-cart which had a loose piece of iron across its door—and she remembered that, when the door opened, a glorious smell of hot fresh loaves used to come out. And there was always the “whish” of wind in the trees that one listened to with a queer, eerie feeling down one’s spine. . . . Then, all in a minute, she thought that if she felt like this, what must Kenny feel, and how often did the same memories return to him, closed away in his captivity?

She got back to find commotion in the flat. Hil was packing in violent haste, in response to a telegram she had received telling her that Larry was wounded and lying in a hospital in Boulogne. She was not crying, but she was very pale, and she told Elodie that she had been frozen since the moment it had arrived.

“They say I can cross to-night,” she said, in a queer, small voice, “and so I may be in time, El—I may be in time.”

Elodie could do nothing and say very little. It is one of the hardest parts of tragedy that the fondest, kindest friend may only stand afar off and look on with sorrowing eyes.

Hil, always nervous of travelling, had to go out alone; but now she did not think of that. She knew that Larry was lying grievously wounded away in France, and the “Batt” and the Ministry had vanished utterly out of sight; they were no more real than Edith’s lovers in the agonized moment of reality, and Elodie stood wondering at the wreckage on the waters of life.

## CHAPTER XXVI

**I**N the morning following upon his discovery that the clothes had arrived which he was to wear during the great adventure Kenny got his English mail, and, sandwiched in between his letters, there was the derelict envelope he had given to Karl Haff.

So great was the intensity of his feeling that it took him a moment or two to pull himself together. Joy can be every bit as overpowering as grief, and Kenny's captivity had taken its toll of his nerves, in spite of himself.

The letter enclosed was a short one, written in the handwriting which seems common to all foreigners, and it said that Kennedy was to wait until Thursday (the day being Monday), and that at the far end of the football ground there was a small square where sods were piled. Near to this a ground sheet would be laid, covered with other sods still deep in grass, and under the sheet he was to lie hidden until after dark. At the southeast corner of the wall there was a heavy growth of ivy which made it possible to climb, and the thick ground sheet would cover the wire and enable him to get over it. A fire alarm would be given after dark, the fire to break out in the guard-room, and for a time the sentry would be called away.

Kennedy read his letter, a prey to such violent feeling that his hands shook, and he wondered if any of his companions had noticed his emotion. He could not have spoken just then had his life depended upon it, and he stared at the wall behind his bed and began to follow the course of the cracks in the plaster, which made a kind of map. "Duisburg, Orsoy, Rheinberg—and then the twisty semicircles of the Rhine, Wesel,

Xanten, Emmerich, Lobith, Elten——” The names chanted themselves to him like a song of passion, and he could not face the room for a time, for he felt that George, whose own mail had dwindled terribly, was sure to be at his old amusement of watching people’s faces.

He intended to tell George of his plan, when they went out for exercise, and, on Thursday, they were to play a football match. Kenny’s nerves jumped again; what if he were to get a sprained ankle? He felt as if he would follow Bland’s example and come in and hang himself if Fate played him any such tricks.

Karl Haff! Karl Haff! why had he ever doubted him, or allowed himself to think that the man had let him down? He breathed heavily, and felt half-suffocated. What a wonderful reward for such a little show of kindness. He had met with cruelty enough from German hands, but this atoned for all. Somewhere, behind all the rabid fury which had been so carefully worked up into red rage, there still remained men who had not lost their balance, and who were ready to take grave risks for the sake of a friendship. It was as though he looked through a night of dense darkness, and saw the light of a kindly window shining like a beacon and guide. It lifted a kind of spiritual weight off his soul, and he tasted some of the sudden healing of forgiveness. He thought over the long time he had spent in Crefeld, and, still watching the fine tracery of the cracks on the wall, he got into some kind of perspective. The monotony and the weariness fell away from him, and even the old dreams were distant now. Dreams of the heather on the uplands, the scent of apple orchards, and long, sweet grass; the stars by night as he had seen them in his shooting camps crowding the sky overhead like a swarm of shining bees. What visions he had presented to himself. He tingled with passion as he thought that only a few days ahead there lay free-



dom. His journey called to him, and put a spell upon him, *bizarre* and only dimly seen, but stored with gladness. How was he going to endure the days that stretched between him and Thursday?

Karl was taking a big risk, sheltered only by his obvious dislike for Kennedy, and if anything were to leak out his fate would be decided by men who had no scruple. Kenny wished that he could do something for Karl, even if it were only to thank him, but they were very unlikely ever to speak to one another again. His debt was so tremendous, but perhaps he could meet him at the *Ewige Lampe*, or there leave some small token, besides payment. But how could one pay a man for having done so much? He was giving him back to life, and there was no way by which such an account might be settled.

In the middle of his thoughts the *Kommandant* came through the barracks on a morning tour of inspection. The inmates of Room 24 stood up, and the *Kommandant* spoke to them with his usual irritated, sulky manner. He harangued them all, and said that he was ashamed of them, and he singled out Kennedy for special attack. Once the usual *strafe* was over, the day began to take its normal course, and though the weather was very cold, the prisoners were turned into the yard. Winter was coming, and they had lost hope again. Winter seemed to be the end of everything.

Finding a corner of the square which was out of the draught, and where the sunlight fell more kindly, Kenny leaned his back against the bricks and looked at Palliser.

He had kept his secret so long that it had now become very hard to speak of it at all, and he found himself considering in what words he might express it. It was so sinfully hard to leave George Pal behind, but George had said, always, that he was too old for two things, suicide or escape. Compton, too, had regarded

attempts at escape as madness, and, since Teddy's venture, no one in the camp had tried to get out. Kenny took off his cap, and the sunlight touched the golden brown of his hair; his blue eyes, with their curiously light brightness, were full of feeling, and his mouth with its whimsical sensitive line was smiling.

"What are you grinning at, Ken?" Palliser asked. "You seem to have a good joke inside your so-called head. Hand it on, for the love of God; there aren't so many around this elysium on earth."

"I'm going to tell you," said Kenny, "only it's sticking in my throat. It all goes back to ages ago, before the war."

"Fire away," said Palliser, humping his shoulders, and burying his chin in the collar of his coat. "There's nothing else to do, so I'll listen, only make it amusing, you old blighter; put some ginger into it. My stock is running low, and I haven't thought of a new yarn for weeks."

"I once went to dine in a dirty little restaurant off Soho."

"Oh, you did, did you?" Palliser winked, and dug him in the ribs. "What a naughty boy."

"Stop ragging, George, it's a damned serious story."

"My God," said Palliser, "I'm fed up with that sort. Let me off, Ken. Tell it to our bold Engineer, he looks gloomy enough to appreciate it; I'm damned if I shall. But it begins well; why not make up something with a dash of mustard to it?"

"The name of the place was *Mon Repas*, and I was waited on there," he dropped his voice, "by—and this will surprise you George—the corporal of the guard."

Palliser laughed unrestrainedly. "And you left tuppence on the tray, so he never forgave you? Is that why he hymns his hate so consistently? It's a warning to people who economize in tips, by Gad it is. But this is deuced funny."

"There was a row in the place," went on Kenny, "and a dirty-looking swine of a Levantine began to attack Fritz. I felt awfully sorry for him. I hate to see any one humbled——"

"I know," said Palliser, giving him a sideways glance which was full of affection.

"Oh, it was a beastly exhibition, though I don't know why. Now I expect we wouldn't really notice it very much, but then one was different, and I couldn't stand it, so I interfered. I really cannot remember that I did anything worth talking of, there were no broken noses or black eyes, it was just a sordid wrangle, and I forgot all about it ages ago."

"And Fritz, to show his gratitude, has persecuted you for faith's sake ever since you came here."

Kenny altered his position and put on his cap again.

"You remember when I was sent to the Common Camp for punishment?"

"Yes, well," said Palliser. "It was a cheery time. Bland swung by the neck until he was dead, and you playing catch as catch can with the lice in the men's prison. Oh, it *was* a cheery time."

"The corporal came to fetch me away, and when I got into the fly he suddenly seized both my hands and poured out the whole story. It was rather like having an electric shock, George."

Palliser turned and looked at Kennedy. His expression had altered, and he watched him with a touch of alarm in his eyes.

"He then told me that he would help me to escape, and we planned everything, except how I was to get out."

"Rather a big hole in the Ballade," said Palliser. "I could have done as much for you myself, son."

"Listen, George; it's been in my thoughts ever since, and a night ago I found the clothes in my mattress. It makes me sweat every time I go out of the room, and I'm thankful that the *Kommandant*

decided that we were to make our own beds. If any of those fellows found the bundle, it would be all up with me."

"Look here, man, look here, look here," said Palliser, gripping his arm; "you don't mean that you are actually going to try it. Don't be such a bloody fool. Haven't we all got enough to bear without your taking wild-cat chances, and going out to get shot? You *can't* mean it, Kenny. Think of Hilda, and that girl of yours. Have you no sense?"

"I'm leaving for home on Thursday," said Kenny, and the joy in him was like daybreak over his face.

Palliser stared and blinked hard, and then he broke into song in a thready, cracked voice:

"Say, don't you envy me, I'll catch the ten past three—  
And at the table, next to Mabel—"

I've got the bally words all wrong somehow." He cleared his throat and blew his nose, and began again:

"The roses round the door make me love Mother more,  
I'll see my sweetheart, Flo, and friends I used to know—"

he trailed off dismally. "I don't seem in good voice to-day," he added, and he stared across the square to the bare blocks of houses. Kenny felt a lump in his throat, and he said nothing.

"So it's come at last," Palliser said after a pause. "I always felt it would, old sport, and if your heart is set on it, it may be best. But can you trust the corporal? I've never liked pale men with spotty faces. How can you be sure that he is really playing straight?"

"I know he is," Kenny said slowly. "You'd know, too, if you'd heard him speak about it. Gratitude seems a damned queer thing, and all out of proportion."

"A case of 'where are the nine?'" remarked Palliser. "It's certainly a wonderful story, Kenny,

and, by God, I wish you luck. I don't know how I am going to put in Thursday night, and Friday and——" He fell silent again and moved his shoulders as though adjusting a sudden weight which had fallen on them. "How long will it be before we can hear, I wonder?"

"I shall give Fritz a message of some kind to bring you. It ought to be easy for me to see him at the *Ewige Lampe*," said Kennedy, and he then explained the outlines of the plan of escape to Palliser.

"And while you are suffocating under the ground sheet the rest of the football crowd will file in? I see. And then Fritz will call the roll. It's touch and go work, Kenny. What if Urlaub changes things at the last moment?"

"I must chance that."

"And just about the time when all our merry men are settled in, and you are missing, I suppose I break the news?"

"Please do, George," Kenny nodded and looked up at the sky.

"And then we get the little excitement of a fire alarm in the guard-house. How do you suppose that Fritz intends to light up the happy home? He will probably stand too near the fire and set light to his clothes. That would be picturesque; I like that idea. Ready to burn himself to a cinder for you, Kenny. Good old Fritz."

"I don't know how he will do it," said Kennedy, "but by the time it's out I shall be over the wall by the corner where that clump of ivy grows."

Palliser looked at it and whistled.

"I'd lend you my wings if I could spare them," he said, "only I can't. It's a steep bit of climbing, but I suppose you are fit."

"I'm as fit as I have ever been," said Kenny, "only I'm in such a funk about the scrum on Thursday I shall disgrace the block, for I won't go in if I can help it."

"Don't play," said Palliser, catching Kenny's enthusiasm. "Say when you get out that you have a bilious attack, or the 'shagreens' or the 'migreens,' as de Beussent has it. Be morose, and hang about with a black face on you. Besides, in any case, you can't wear shorts and a jersey."

I had thought of coming back to change after it was over. I could double in while the room was empty, and then get out again with time to spare. I'll put on slacks and a greatcoat, and leave the coat outside in a hole. It would be dusk by then."

"Listen to me," said Palliser, "I've got a better idea than that. I'll go sick myself, and you will have to stay in to keep my spirits up. As soon as they are all out you can get yourself up as a Danish sailor, or whatever fancy rig it is that you are to affect, and I'll give you my own Sunday breeches, which are baggy and comfortable, and my tunic, which will cover you up like charity. How I shall look in your clothes I'm damned if I know. Erna will love me more than ever——" He crowed his queer, brave laugh, but it didn't come off as gaily as he could have wished it to.

They talked on, arranging every detail with growing excitement, and Kennedy did not feel any longer that the day was cold. He and Palliser began to walk together, and Compton joined them. Compton had collected grievances as some people collect autographs or china, and he was always prepared to return, in default of other subjects, to the delinquencies of his late C.O. His captivity had in no way humanized him on this point, and he walked with his erect and strutting bearing between his two friends, going over ground which took him back years before the war, and he even traversed Asia as he discussed his obsession. By now he might have been a Brigadier, he thought. Palliser had formed a theory about the men both in prison and at home who said they "would have been Brigadiers

by this time if——” and he had arrived at the mathematical conclusion that there were more would-be Generals in the British army than any other rank except privates, so it always amused him to draw Compton out. From that subject Compton went on to the specimens of the new army which had begun to drift in. He could hardly be induced to be civil to them.

“Shop boys, bank clerks, sons of grocers,” he said; “what the mess will be like after it Heaven knows. It took the army three years to recover from South Africa, and now I don’t believe that soldiering will be a gentleman’s job for two generations.”

“I doubt if that matters,” said Palliser airily.

Compton burst into a fresh volume of rage. His powers of intensive criticism were tremendous, and he indulged them to the full.

All the time Kennedy hardly listened. He knew all that Compton had to say in any case, and had heard it only too frequently. His mind was full of the future, and he felt the strange sense of oppression which is part of the coming of a great event, even when it is longed for beyond all words. Perhaps people felt like this when they were going to be married, or going to die? His own natural enthusiasm of rebellion swept over him like a broadside, and both Palliser and Compton appeared as unreal as their talk. George was the best friend man ever had, and he hated to leave him, but Compton was merely an instance of how little some people ever changed, even when war had caught them and flung them wide of their own known way of life.

There was glory in everything that last Monday in Crefeld, and Kenny looked at the trees which were now nearly bare, and remembered them in their spring green. He would never see them again, and the branches which spread across his window and had sometimes reminded him of clawing hands were no longer menacing. The trees of the world and the

woods were friendly to fugitives and helped them, and nature was not cruel.

The sentimental orderly was outside the reserve lazarette, and expressed his soul in song; the words came up to Kenny as he leaned out of his window, watching the dusk gathering in the sky and the stars coming out like homing pigeons.

*Tret' an am frühen Morgen  
Und lasse heim die Sorgen*

sang the orderly, and the words came floating upwards. He was a gross-looking creature, but he could sing, and there was a sense of beauty in the sound of his voice.

To Kenny it seemed as though the orderly was singing a kind of farewell, and the soft vibrations quivered through the twilight. A thrill of triumph seized him, and he thought of Elodie, and that he would see her soon, look into her dear eyes, and hear her voice again, which he had not heard except in those many, many dreams. Thought had become such a strong factor in the prison life that its powers had increased, and now he could bring her to him at times with almost supernatural force and reality. She was at home in England, waiting for his touch, and when he could take her soft young body in his arms the words would well up at last, and they would forget all the pain in the joy of reunion. Everything else would be remote from them in that white mist of passion and joy. He could feel his own heart beating fast at the fancy which his mind had pictured. It was touching him with fire at the very magic of it all, and he had to remind himself that he was still a prisoner, with leagues and leagues of country to travel before he could count himself a free man.

The thought of his journey came to him with a fresh renewal of energy. He had been cooped up so



long. He knew the pattern of the shadows on the prison walls as he knew the rusty crown of wire, and all those things which held him in, with an intimacy which was heart-breaking in its closeness and despair. He had been held away from open roads, and soon he would walk the world again. He did not expect that it was going to be easy, and he knew that there would be tremendous risks to take—risks that would lie around every hour until he was back in England. Even in Holland he might be interned, and find himself with only one month of leave in the year and idling the time in misery for all the rest.

Kennedy had no intention of taking any chance of such a hopeless anticlimax to his adventure. He was going home first, and then out to fight, for he had done no fighting, unless you counted the scuffle in the *Panier d'Or*. He wanted something better than that, and the grubby, wretched months of captivity, to offer to Elodie. . . . His thoughts sought her again, and he talked to her in his heart, after the unchanging habit of all lovers since the world began. Behind him in the room the Russians were growing irritable. Kennedy had kept the window open far too long, and Palliser recalled him from the stars.

"If you want to study the occultations of Orion, you must wait till the summer," he said, laying his hand on Kennedy's arm. "Come inside, Kenny, and take a hand at bridge."

Kennedy turned in with a laugh and closed the windows.

"If you were the Major now," said the irrepressible Pal, "I'd say that there was either a woman or a bottle in the sky to keep you so interested."

The Engineer Major looked up from a book, and looked down again. He usually refused to reply to Palliser's sallies at his expense.

And at last Monday evening was over, and Kenny slept, disregarding the "hump" in his bed, cheerfully.

Tuesday had to be got through, and Wednesday, and on Wednesday his appetite failed him, and he felt as though he was enduring long torments. It worried him, because he had not guessed before how much the life he had led had told on him. If he were to be so jumpy at the start, what would he be like on Thursday? Palliser, who had got a tin of beef cubes, gave them to him and begged of him to make an effort to eat.

"The only thing you may do on an empty stomach is to make love, Ken," he said; "you can't expect to make a walking tour. I know it's a bit trying, but you must eat."

On Wednesday the football team discussed the forthcoming match, and Palliser said he was feeling rotten. He didn't know what was up with him, but he was low and depressed. There seemed very little sham about it, Kennedy thought, as he looked at Palliser's tired face, and it was as though he had come to the end of his tether. He refused to play the gramophone, and sat with his greatcoat tied round his shoulders by the arms, the picture of misery, though he winked at Kennedy now and then when no one was looking.

It was Wednesday night, and the time ebbed out. Everywhere the minutes were really of the same duration, but nobody knew how it was for the rest. All round the shores of the world great tides were receding, and slowly the vitality of life was lessening as night marched on to dawn. To his great relief, Kenny slept the moment he put his head on the pillow, and he did not wake until the sound of the bugle in the square tore the sky. Then he got out of his bed, and the normal difficulties of dressing began, but Kenny watched the East grow bright with his clear eyes as he had never yet watched it in any day of all his life, for this was Thursday. Like everything else, it had really come at last.

## CHAPTER XXVII

**T**IME played strange tricks with Kennedy Gleeson during Thursday. He thought that an age spread between him and the mid-day meal, and quite suddenly he found that it had passed. He was like a man who knows himself to be hours too soon for his train, and so dallies by the way, until he discovers with a start that he has only two minutes left in which to catch it. Again, in the afternoon, he was only changing his clothes, while George Palliser held the door, by the time the men on the football ground were just beginning to come back at the conclusion of the match. At the last there had not been a minute to lose, and he had to pitch on Palliser's clothes as best he could, and, gripping his hand silently, go out of the door, almost without looking back. When he had gone George sat on his bed and stared at the floor, his face working, but he took a strong line with himself, and he got up and walked to the window. Kennedy was walking across the parade ground in the gathering twilight; he had spoken to one or two of his friends, and he was out of sight and had vanished into the dimness that already swallowed the distance by the time Palliser had recovered himself, and was able to greet Compton and de Beussent with a cheery word.

Oh, admirable George Palliser, is there any monument made with hands fit to be placed to the memory of men such as you? Your record lives eternally in the hearts of those who knew you. You were a rough diamond and had never trouble to aspire to either polish or finish, and your stories were lurid and unfit

for ears polite, but, behind all that, in your own unconscious way, you were a light in a very dark place.

Kenny ran down the staircase and out across the parade ground. The football ground was at a considerable distance, and already the lights in the gaunt, bare windows were flaring up, and you could see the inmates of rooms walking about or sitting inside. It was a cold night, with a bite of frost in the air, and the sky was misted with low vaporous clouds which were dispersing after sunset, hurrying off, like ladies to a ball. Kenny spoke to a few belated footballers who were too full of their game to bother to ask him where he was going. You could hardly be going anywhere inside the walls of the *Husaren Kasernen*, and it was a question which was not worth asking. Having said something to them which sounded in his own ears like gibberish, Kenny hastened on. The night sentries would not yet be on guard, and the man who was to relieve the guardian of his own special beat was hastening his hour of freedom by walking to the gate near the canteen, where soon he would be drinking a *bock* and smoking a large pipe.

Kennedy watched him, standing hidden in a sheltered corner, and then walked on again quite slowly. If he were to be stopped now he intended to say that he had dropped his cigarette-case when he was watching the game, and had come to look for it before he forgot where he had dropped it, and he trudged across the grass which was soft and sticky after the day's game.

At the corner near the sod bank he saw, as he bent down, the carefully replaced squares of turf, still deep in grass. It must have been a difficult job to arrange this he thought, for he did not know that Karl Haff had arrived at the arrangement by telling the turf-cutter that he wanted growing sods for his cousin's garden, and that the *Kommandant* would not permit him to take them away, so he intended to steal them

when the *Herr* was on leave. Meanwhile he wished to have them cut and replaced over the ground, so that all would be ready for removal, and he gave the measurements of his cousin's lawn, which far exceeded the limits of the ground sheet, but amply convinced the workman, whom he bribed with ten marks.

"Then will I have a percentage from my cousin," Karl added, as he grumbled at the sum, "not very much, still times are hard, and one must make what one can."

Almost at once Kenny discovered the hard edge of the ground sheet, and, loosening the turf carefully, he crawled under. It was a tense moment, for, should he be caught there, there would be no imaginable excuse which might explain his amazing conduct. It was very dark and suffocating under the sheet, and Kenny did not dare to move. He could neither see nor hear, and he had to remain there until the fire-alarm sounded, and warned him that the coast was clear. All sorts of cramps and pains caught his body, but he did not dare to stir. The sight of a local earthquake, even in the thick dust, might attract the notice of the sentry, and he was unable to hear his footstep on the path. Sometimes he wondered if he were completely covered, or if he had upset the sods. It was an odd idea to be lying out there under the grasses as though he were dead and buried, and still to be most vividly alive. He wondered whether he had not dozed off once or twice, and he wondered if, when one really died, one came to in some quiet, unexpected place, like a railway-carriage travelling through realms unknown, or to find that you were at a dinner-party, talking to a girl you had met ages ago. . . . What did happen? He stopped, and caught hold of his fancies again. He was to listen for the fire-alarm, and if he allowed himself to wander off, it might sound in vain for him.

What was that? He did not stir, but he felt that

danger was near him somehow. What was it? Had the sentry got a dog? No, of course he had not. There had been a row about dogs, and America had intervened; more likely it was a cat which had scampered over his resting-place. Kenny set his teeth hard. He thought that George Palliser would have said it was a goose walking over his grave; and then he began to wonder if George had told them all yet, and that, if he had, they would be now gambling on his chances of escape.

It was getting very hot under the sheet, and Kenny had burrowed in a little further; he could not stir his wrist so as to look at his watch, which had a luminous dial, and, so far as he knew, he felt as though he had lain there for years. The earth was cold and clammy under his face and hands, and his neck felt as though it were held by red-hot pincers; also his old wound was hurting him, as it did in any change of weather, and the frost was causing it to awaken and give him pangs along a whole network of nerves down his shoulder and arm. At last he could bear it no longer, and he moved slightly and lifted a corner of the sheet. He could only see through the thick matted grass, but the fresh air was grateful to him, and he noticed that it was perceptibly darker than when he had hidden himself away. The sentry was coming now, certainly, for the path was hard and echoed under his feet, and Kenny withdrew again, still keeping one corner of the sheet raised. He could not bear not to know his own fate, or just to wait in ignorance until the man actually walked over him if he were to walk across the grass. He caught a whiff of tobacco. It was, of course, strictly against orders to smoke, and the fact that the man on guard was smoking meant that he intended to stay in the farthest corner for as long as he could without detection. Kennedy cursed him whole-heartedly, and hardly dared breathe. The time dribbled by as slowly as the drips

that go to build a stalactite in a cave, and the sentry sat down on the pile of cut sods, not ten yards from where Kenny lay, and threw a stone at the cat which had first disturbed him. The stone fell close to the ground sheet, and set Gleeson's nerves jumping again.

What a fantastic and extraordinary experience it was, he thought; and gradually he became quite sure of himself. All his old self-control returned, and he felt that he could now trust himself, whatever happened. Panic had gone, and he had conquered. He breathed quite easily and regularly, and the violent beating of his heart steadied to the normal once more. He remembered an old racing experience when he had been little more than a boy, and how he had gone through much the same range of feelings, until his head had cleared and he was able to ride with judgment. All the time the unconscious sentry sat and smoked, and beat his hands together, for the night promised to be fine and frosty. He made all sorts of different motions with his hands and feet, and Kenny felt as though he were going to sit there for ever, when, across the rustling silence, there came the sound of a bell, followed by whistling and distant shouts.

The sentry got up and stamped the contents of his pipe into the ground; he spoke to himself, and Kenny imagined that he was looking towards the guard-room.

"*Flamme!*" he said aloud, and then, "*Lieber Gott, es ist ein feursbrunst,*" and, as the shouting continued, he ran towards the barracks, his footsteps echoing away on the frost-bound path.

Kennedy threw off the ground sheet and sprang to his feet. He was very stiff, but his feeling of excitement warmed his blood, and he pulled the sheet from under the sods and ran to the ivy-covered corner of the wall. It was quite dark now, and, looking back, he could see the figures of men running to and fro near the guard-house; they were getting out the fire-

engine, and pandemonium was raging. From afar he could hear the voice of Urlaub giving hoarse orders, and everywhere windows had been thrown open and heads were leaning out. Karl Haff had brought off his *coup* with entire success, and for an hour or two the guard would be kept busy.

He climbed the thick, closely knotted wood of the ivy, and flung the ground sheet over the wire at the top. The wall was little less than sixteen feet high, and the wire ran two feet higher than the coping, which was cemented and covered with broken glass. Kennedy tore his hands as he pulled himself up, and he began to wonder if any one would be on the road below when he dropped. If there were, it would complicate things terribly. What if a crowd were running to see the fire, and he found himself caught the second he actually landed?

He had gained the top of the wall, and the barbed wire cut through the thickness of the sheet, but not deeply, though he knew that his hands were bleeding. He looked over, and peered down into the lane that skirted the *Nord Strasse*. Karl Haff had not told him what was likely to be on the far side of the wall, but he realized that there was not much to fear, as all that he could see was a mean lane between two walls and a blaze of light from the street beyond, where a considerable amount of traffic passed both by night and day. Kenny gripped one of the staples which held the wire, and swung himself over; he hung by one hand to the coping and found a slight foothold on the face of the brick wall, just enough to steady himself and give him a free hand to pull the sheet, which rent into a dozen tears, and then fell like a great unwieldy bird on to the ground beneath. Kenny wished to leave no trace of his passing, so that any story which Karl Haff invented, to throw the authorities off the scent, would not be discredited. He then dropped to the pathway, and stood breathing like a man who has run a race,



feeling very weak in the knees, and needing the support of the wall.

He was out, and he had next to divest himself of George Palliser's coat and trousers, as, if any eye should catch sight of him in his present attire, he would be back again within five minutes. Pulling the sheet off the ground, he folded it and flung it round his shoulders and stuffed his cap into his pocket; in this way he was slightly disguised, and the lane appeared to be deserted. He followed it round a bend, where a small bridge crossed a stream, and, sitting down in the shelter of the archway close to the water, he made his impromptu toilet.

Palliser had made him put some soot in a paper in his pocket to dab over his face, and he had a coarse red handkerchief, which he was to tie round his jaw. The blue jersey and trousers were what any poor sailor might have worn, and were far from new, and the cap was a battered thing with a patent leather peak. It was large, and he could draw it over his forehead. It did not take five minutes to make the alteration, and, when it was complete, Kenny wrapped the suit of khaki and the ground sheet round a heavy stone and pushed them with a splash into the water. Then he stood up and stretched himself. It had all really come so quickly that he could not fully realize it. He remembered once having freed a tightly tethered goat, which he had taken pity upon, on an Irish roadside, and, though the animal was free, it still hobbled painfully, and it took time before, suddenly realizing that the bonds were gone, it sprang to the top of a bank and understood that it was bound no longer. He, too, still felt the constraint of the chains, and he had to encourage himself to face the noise and glare of the streets.

Once he got back into the *Nord Strasse* some impulse compelled him to walk past the gates of the *Husaren Kasernen*, and he saw that they were closed.

Evidently the fire was becoming extinguished, and, glancing at his watch, he saw that it was very much later than he had imagined.

He had listened in the lane so long, before he could bring himself to walk with a slouching step into the crowd, that he had wasted valuable time, but he was as shy of facing people as a colt of facing a train, and it took a tremendous effort. The sight of the barrack gates again awoke fears in his heart, and he walked on quickly; he felt as if he were really on the red-hot crust of a live volcano, and the street lamps danced in a fantastic jumble of lights. The shops were closed, but the cafés and the theatres were still open, and men and women streamed in and out through gaping doors, and he wanted to run and get somewhere where he might hide from them all.

He expected every one to look at him or stop him, and he thought that he was being followed more than once, and made impulsive détours from the track which Karl Haff had given him in his minute directions. He wondered if a murderer, with the blood-stained knife in his pocket, felt like this, as he left the scene of the murder and made his way home? Kenny was experiencing the sensations of a fugitive, and he knew that he must overcome his own inward shrinkings and fears. He stood and stared in at the window of a restaurant, with a sheet of looking-glass behind it, reflecting plates of tomatoes and slices of ham and sausage, and the sight reassured him, for his own ghostly reflection was strange to himself. One side of his face was smeared over with soot, and the peak of his cap came down on his eyes, his chin was hidden in the red handkerchief, and all that showed of him was gaunt and haggard. He had not realized how dragged and lined he had grown, and only his eyes looked out at him with recognition.

More satisfied and less nervous of being recognized as a British officer, he walked onwards, his hands deep

in his pockets and his head bent. He was beginning to enjoy it all, and a sudden wave of exhilaration came over him. Crefeld was an alien town to him, thronged with his enemies, but he loved it, and he stood and drank in the sight of the vista where the *Lutherische Strasse* joined in, close to the *Ost Wall*. He had now to traverse the *Garten Strasse* to find himself in the quiet backwater, where the sign of the *Ewige Lampe* would be easy to recognize. Karl had given him various landmarks, and he identified the bronze statue to Karl Wilhelm, the composer of the "Wacht um Rhein," which was daily decorated with fresh laurels by the admiring townsfolk. Stray bits of information came back to him as he trudged along, whistling the refrain of the song sung by the sentimental orderly. There had been a battle of Crefeld, where the great Brunswicker had defeated the French centuries ago, and he wondered if any long-forgotten French prisoner had walked the streets at night, seeking to escape, and moved by the same feelings. Life had to repeat itself and fit the same circumstances to generations who had forgotten the past, until the whole huge collection of experiences was piled high as heaven. There had been large spinning manufactories near the town, and Urlaub had said that these were now closed. In any case, almost everything made in the looms was for export to England and America, and the good Urlaub thought that those happy and prosperous times would hardly return again.

Kenny was on good terms with himself at last, and could think of things which were outside his own condition. He passed the doors of a cinema theatre, and passed with a keen desire to go in; it was ages since he had seen a show of any kind, but he felt that he must wait until his beard had grown, and try and remember that he had a toothache. The lights and the traffic were going to his head like wine, and he knew that he must watch himself lest he grew reckless.

So far he had not spoken to any one, and that would be a further test. His voice had not the unmistakable clear-cut tones of the *Engländer* but it had no resemblance to that of a German, either from the North or South. A sailor is permitted latitude in this respect, and there was no reason why a Dutchman might not have the soft inflection which was Kenny's heritage of birth.

He crossed the road, dodging among the traffic with a renewed sense of fear, and followed the street to the right. Turning quickly at a corner, he found himself in a kind of bay or backwater, where only a few houses stood in rather a forlorn group, like a family of maiden ladies who have been left behind by everything and half-forgotten. In front of one of these there was the wrought-iron lamp-post, and the quarter seemed to have declined and sagged into disrepair. It certainly looked disreputable, in spite of its connection with better days, and Kenny glanced up at the window above the entrance which bulged out into the street; there was a light burning behind the curtain, and, without waiting any longer, he walked up the broken steps and knocked.

The door was opened by a big man, who stood full in Kenny's path, and when he stepped back and the light fell on his face, Gleeson saw that he had a tawny beard and a sardonic face.

"Who are you?" he asked roughly, and Kenny replied in a thick voice that he was a sailor, looking for a night's lodging.

"Who sent you here?" demanded the burly man.

"Karl Haff, my very good friend from Schwerin. Are you Hans Brüderich, and is this the *Ewige Lampe*?"

Brüderich stood back and let him pass, and led the way upstairs. The light in the upper room had been turned low, and the moon shone through the window, making white spears where the curtains fell a little

apart. There was a smell of beer and coffee in the air, and when Bröderich turned up the lamp the light revealed a kind of living room, with an open fire at one end and the remains of a meal on the table. The ceiling and the walls were all of dark wood, and the effect of it had its own special charm, but it was untidy and dusty. Piles of newspapers lay on the floor and on chairs, and Kenny noticed a rosary and a bit of dried palm on the wall over a holy picture.

"You are *Katholik*?" Kenny asked, talking more in his own natural voice.

Bröderich crossed himself and nodded, but made no other reply. He busied himself setting food before Gleeson, and after he had sat down he stood looking at Kenny.

"*Nun*," he said, "you see me?"

"Certainly," replied Kennedy, his eyes lighting with laughter. He rather liked the look of his host, and it was so warm and wide and altogether different inside the *Ewige Lampe* compared with the other places where he had been.

"I am a hairdresser; my shop was in the King's Road in Chelsea," he broke into English, having closed the door carefully. "In Vale Terrace. To my father belonged the *Ewige Lampe*. He dies, and I come here just one week before war is declared. My wife remains in England, for she is English, so we are pulled two ways, *nicht wahr*? I do not say 'Take my hand, brother,' but I am prepared to believe that you are a foreigner—of what nationality I cannot say."

"I am Irish," said Kenny, helping himself to some cheese.

Bröderich looked at him, and made a gesture of astonishment.

"You, Irish!" he said, "*Ach*, you Irish! A people whose wild blood makes wanderers."

"I shall be a wanderer for some time," Kenny said with a smile.

"Now for a glass of wine," said Brüderich, and went to a cupboard in the wall. There was a touch of intimacy in his voice and manner, and he filled a glass for himself and one for Kennedy.

"Good luck," he said, and then he paused and held up his glass to the light. "I do not like the English," he added, "they are godless swine. Since you are Irish I may tell you so."

"Tell me any damned thing you like," said Kennedy cheerfully, but he noticed that Brüderich's face had altered, and that his voice sounded hard and raucous.

"Irish Brigade?" he asked breathlessly.

Kennedy suddenly felt as though he held a hand at poker.

"You want to know too much," he remarked, and he flickered an eyelid.

A wink is a wonderful thing, and, after all, it betrays nothing, whatever it may infer.

"I see," remarked Brüderich, after a queer silence. "Then your escape will not be very difficult, *was?*"

"I have to stay here until I can grow a beard," Kennedy replied, giving Brüderich another look of significance, which he himself would have been at a loss to explain.

"So?"

"And I am to see no one, no one except Karl Haff, should he come," continued Kennedy. It was like taking a part at a minute's notice in a melodrama, and he rather enjoyed it on the whole. He felt that he must probe into Brüderich's secret soul, so he spoke with sudden ferocity of voice and manner.

"I will have no inquisitive police or civil commissioners coming to ask questions. What my business is, is known to those in authority. Understand me, Brüderich, I shall stay here as long as it suits me to, but if the smallest hint gets out, you will regret it."

Brüderich pushed out his hands.

"*Mit vergnügen*," he said, "it is the mistake of Karl Haff. He has given me no hint of this.

"He was perfectly right," said Kennedy, wondering again exactly what the Irish Brigade might mean, and wishing that he knew a little more about it. "Neither will he. I am only an escaped prisoner. We have our own way of doing things, and our own reasons. Now, Bröderich, I shall go to bed."

He took off his cap and pulled the handkerchief away from his face. Kenny knew enough of himself in his own unobtrusive way, to realize that he could impress the man better so, as, indeed, he did, for the owner of the *Ewige Lampe* stood with the light held over his head, and stared at him with fascinated eyes. He looked very compelling as he stood there, haggard, and with his face far from clean, in the old blue clothes and a dull coloured necktie; and, as the light fell on him, Kenny endured the inspection with his proud, daring look, and his eyes immensely vital and full of life.

"Indeed, I see now," said Bröderich. "So; then you are the man?"

"Yes, I am the man," Kenny replied, and he wondered who, in the name of all that was wonderful, the innkeeper had mistaken him for.

It was a fortuitous mistake, in any case, and he certainly was not going to quarrel with it. He was very tired, and all he wanted was a bed.

Bröderich showed him into a comfortable room, where he slept between two down mattresses, and never in his whole life, not even when he was a little boy in the Castle Glenfield nursery, had he slept half so well or so soundly.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

**F**OR the first two days after his arrival at the *Ewige Lampe* Kennedy was content to lie in bed. From time to time Brüderich visited him and talked in an excited voice of the great hopes which Germany placed upon an alliance with the majority of Irish Catholics.

Kenny, who had heard very little of the politics of his own country, lay listening to his talk, and only made cautious and careful replies. According to Brüderich's description, his country had gone dead against England and France, and there was a strong feeling that soon Ireland was to rise in armed force and break free from British rule. Brüderich felt keenly on the subject, and his attitude towards Kennedy, whom he believed to be an emissary, was thoroughly cordial. He tried once or twice to elicit from Kennedy exactly what his orders were, but he was met by an unvarying silence, and Kennedy said only that he could tell him nothing. He even treated Brüderich with a touch of harshness, and he told him plainly that neither he nor Fritz, whom he had now come to know as Karl Haff, were to receive any confidences from him.

He had escaped from the Crefeld prison, certainly. It had been "arranged," and his going onwards was also arranged for. So long as he could keep up the fiction he had the whip-hand of Brüderich, and he intended to keep it.

The inmates of the *Ewige Lampe*, besides Brüderich, were a deaf old woman-servant and a young girl, called Magda. Magda was curious about him, and he had caught her opening his door and peering in at



him when she supposed him to be asleep. He eliminated the deaf old woman, as he thought them over; Bröderich was tractable and enthusiastic, because he believed Kennedy to be under the folds of the cloak of authority. Had he not thought this he would have traded with Kennedy, and made a bargain for his safety, for he had a lean soul, and, next to his faith, he loved money more than anything else. The girl, Magda, might possibly present a difficulty. If she had a lover who wore an infernal spiked helmet, she might talk. How did one deal with a German servant? Teddy would have hypnotized her with his elegance, and would have given her a lavish tip; George Palliser would have a theory, and, indeed, had one, because he had explained once to Kennedy that no woman is ever really insulted because a man wants to kiss her, and the older and uglier she was, the more certainly the charm worked. George himself had an aunt who had a heavy moustache, and none of her other nephews would go near her; she was grim and very religious, but, as he was well disposed towards any one who was lonely, he went to her house once a year, and pinched her and kissed her, which, though she had never admitted it, had given her so much real satisfaction that, when she died, she left him a very considerable fortune.

Magda was a slatternly creature with weak eyes, but she showed the greatest interest in his toothache, and insisted upon applying hot stupes to his jaw, and Kenny decided that, in the event of trouble, he would try Palliser's infallible receipt. He even began the experiment and pinched her fat, mottled arm when she carried up a tray of food, and certainly she responded almost too rapturously, and wished to remain and chatter for an unlimited time, talking of Bröderich, and how mean he was, for all his piety.

On the evening of the third day he got up and went out into the wind-swept streets. He had tied up his

face, and ventured himself into a music-hall, and, as he sat there, watching the dancers, he felt as though he had been so long away from the surroundings of life, that it affected him like a wild revel of sensuality just to sit in a cheap seat surrounded by people whom he hated, listening to music. There was a spice of danger to it that added enormously to the charm of the experience, and he knew that if any of the crowd had read his mind he would have been hunted to death, for they were all strung up to a high pitch of enthusiasm, and every patriotic song which was sung was received with echoing cheers. These were the home patriots, and they would not have been averse to a little safe blood-letting had they guessed who was in their midst. When the show was over Kennedy came out with the rest and returned to the *Ewige Lampe*; he was expecting a visit from Karl Haff, and he was keenly anxious to hear any news of what had happened in the *Husaren Kasernen*, after he had made his escape. Karl had been such a wonderful friend to him, and he had nothing to give except a little silver cigarette-case which he carried in his pocket. He would have liked to have done so much, and his wonder at Karl never ceased or lessened.

For ever, so he felt, the men of this country would be hateful to him. Who could come close to the tortures which were permitted, and see the careful savagery of a race without turning away with loathing and disgust! They had deliberately tried to break the spirit of the conquered; they had left them in dirt, in misery, and in rags, but among them there were some who went free of the plague, and Karl Haff was one of these. Karl, with his round, wondering face, his queer childish affection, and his powers of remembering such a very little kindness.

He got back to the *Ewige Lampe* after nightfall, and came into the lower room, which was a bar, and at the end of the room, where a large fire was blazing,

a group of men sat together discussing the war and smoking large pipes. Most of them were old, and had long been inhabitants of the "Father-town" of Crefeld, and Kennedy sat down at a little distance off, for he was a humble waterside man from the Netherlands, and his German was rough and rather difficult to understand. Brüderich spoke of him as a "hard-weather bird," one of the lucky ones whose country was not at war. Kennedy made modest answers and smiled at Magda, who flitted about in the background at the beck and call of Brüderich. He was getting on very well, and he felt that to escape, once you were outside prison walls, was not really at all as hard as many people imagined it to be.

About half-an-hour later Karl Haff came in, his military uniform impressing the older men, who grew very much more reticent once he arrived, and soon began to leave, until at last Kennedy found himself sitting alone with Karl.

"My God," he said eagerly, taking the handkerchief from his face, and rubbing the growth of dark hair on his chin, "I can't tell you, Karl, what I feel about you."

"*Ach, mein Herr*, do not thank me," the corporal replied in his troubled voice.

Kennedy bent forward and spoke in a low tone.

"Brüderich has found his own explanation for me. He thinks that I am a member of some crazy 'Irish Brigade,' on my way home to talk sedition to the country. I have let him think so, because I don't trust him. If he thought I was under his thumb he'd lean hard."

"You will leave very soon, *mein Herr*?" asked Karl in a troubled voice. "It is not really safe. I know that the town is being searched, and, though this is a quiet spot, the guard are sure to come. I wish you could leave at once."

"To-night, then," said Kennedy readily, "I don't

want to hang on here. Every day means a lot if the weather gets bad. I shall be clear of Crefeld by morning, and on my way to Duisburg."

"You could be safer there," said Karl. "It is a town where most of the men work in mines and factories. They are Socialists. Remember that if need arises; but, *ach Gott*, I am very uneasy."

"Tell me about Room 24," said Kenny, crossing one leg over the other, and leaning back quite at his ease; Karl Haff's fears made very little appeal to him.

The corporal of the guard began his story. He had waited until Urlaub was out of the guard-room, and then he had taken down a kerosene tin—he said that he wanted a little for cleaning purposes—and, as he bent near the fire, an awkward movement had upset the can, and a second later the oil had ignited and the old wood of the floor was blazing fiercely.

Confusion had followed at once, and that night everything was so completely out of order that none of the inmates of the *Husaren Kasernen* had known anything at all of Kenny's escape except the brotherhood of Room 24.

He had been round to Room 24 and he saw them there. They looked sad and lonely, and the *Herr Hauptmann* Palliser had the appearance of a man who had suddenly aged by years. Rumours had come in from outside, and Karl admitted that he was responsible for them, and the story went that an officer in khaki had been seen running along the *Kanal Strasse* as though he was facing towards the *Hülse Berg* road.

The direct line to the frontier was closely watched, but, beyond a search through likely houses in the town itself, nothing would be done to capture Kennedy before he reached the frontier. In the case of escapes the authorities usually did very little, because, nearly always, the refugee was rounded up somewhere in Belgium or on the Dutch frontier.

"Thank God my beard is growing pretty fast,"

Kenny said, rubbing his chin; "it itches like hell, Karl, and I must look an awful tramp, but so much the better, *nicht wahr?*"

One of Karl's arms was bandaged, and he explained that the fire had caught his sleeve and given him an ugly burn, but he did not mind.

"I signed to the *Herr Hauptmann* that all was well so far," he said, "but until the news comes that you are safe we shall be in great anxiety."

Brüderich came in at the back of the room, through a door near the window, and spoke to Karl. He was going out to make his confession, he said, but as the hour was late, there was not likely to be any interruption. His manner to Kennedy was very deferential, and he kissed Karl Haff on both cheeks and went away. When he had left, Kennedy got up and stood in front of the fire.

"I think to-night," he said reflectively. "It's always better to be sure than sorry, isn't it, Karl Haff? Will you keep this little case of mine, just as a memento of something you have done for a fellow-creature who hasn't got the words to thank you?"

Karl took the case between his hands as though it were a sacred relic and put it silently into his pocket.

There was a long silence between the two men, and then the corporal took up his cap and belt.

"*Leben sie wohl,*" he said slowly, his eyes resting on Kenny's unshaven face, and his voice husky and dry.

Kennedy held out both his hands and took those of Karl.

"I owe you everything," he said, and then Karl stiffened suddenly and wheeled round, facing the door.

"It's the patrol," he said in a low voice.

Footsteps were coming along the pavement outside, and for a tense, rigid moment both Kenny and the corporal waited and listened.

"Pretend you know nothing of me," said Kennedy

quickly. "You've never set eyes on me before, Karl. Don't be a blasted ass, it's no use your getting into the same hole with me."

The door of the *Ewige Lampe* swung open, and a sergeant, followed by two privates, came in. The sergeant was a stupid-looking man with a heavy face, full of his own importance, and Kennedy began to whistle to himself and place more logs on the fire. Having given a nod of recognition to the corporal the sergeant looked quickly round the room.

"Where is Hans Brüderich?" he asked. "I am here to search for an escaped *Engländer*."

"Look for him in the pig-stye," said Kennedy, standing up and stretching his arms over his head. "That is where he should be."

Magda had flitted back, and Kenny fancied that her weak eyes looked scared, which did not comfort him at all.

"Brüderich is out," said Karl Haff, "I came in here for a *bock* and the place was empty, except for this man."

The sergeant, who had laughed at Kenny's witticism, crossed the room, and took him roughly by the shoulder.

"And you, who are you? A man of military age, and not in uniform."

"I am from Scheveningen," he said, humping his shoulders, "a fisherman, *Herr Feldwebel*, now on my way up the Rhine. I belong to the Netherland Steamship Company."

"Where are your papers?" asked the sergeant rudely; he was not suspicious, but he had a desire to show his powers, and he turned to Karl Haff.

"A night in the guard-room will do the man no harm. Was he here when you came in?"

"*Ach, ja*," said Haff gloomily, "he was. I don't see the use of arresting him. If you lived inside the

*Kasernen* you would know that the *Kommandant* is careful of neutrals and their reports."

"I will think it over and search," said the sergeant, and he went up the staircase, followed by his men. At the top he halted and called over the banisters.

"Get those papers ready. Unless I have them and find them correct, you come with me. Remain in charge, corporal."

When he had disappeared, Karl pointed to the door.

"Now," he said, "go quickly, *mein Herr*, go quickly, otherwise there will be no escape."

"If I went he would catch me inside five minutes," said Kenny, sitting down and staring into the fire. "It's a damned nuisance about the papers, but I'll manage it somehow."

They could hear the tramp, tramp, of heavy footsteps overhead, and the sergeant was banging doors and shouting loudly through the upper part of the house. Magda crept forward from the shadows and stared again at Kennedy, who smiled at her.

"Run away, Magda, it's only a bit of fun," he said, "Go and see what the fine *Feldwebel* is doing with Herr Brüderich's belongings."

She drew away again, but loitered near the stairs. The patrol were returning quickly, and the search had been futile. During the time the sergeant had decided that, if he could not catch the missing *Engländer*, he would at least bring back some evidence of his own ardour and efficiency, and he sent his men to hunt in the back premises and outhouses, while he clinched the question with the man from Scheveningen.

"I have questioned this man," said the corporal of the guard, with a return to his old sullen manner; "he says that he has lost his papers, for last night he lay drunk in the house of Kerna Kluf in the low quarter of the town."

The sergeant gave a bellow of laughter, and hit Kennedy on the chest with his fist.

"Then to-night you shall make the acquaintance of the boards in the cells," he said, as Kennedy staggered back a little.

"Any man may get drunk," he said, curbing his temper and speaking in a pleasant voice. "As for Kerna, I can go back there and find my papers . . ." He began to laugh. People, when they are very much afraid, seldom laugh, and Kennedy's sudden outburst of merriment, which he was far from feeling, made the *Feldwebel* pause and consider once more. He turned and caught sight of Magda.

"Is this true what this man says? Is he a lodger here?"

"He is, *mein Herr*," said Magda, rocking from side to side, and picking at the hem of her apron.

"Was he away last night?"

"Ja, *mein Herr*," Magda said, "and he came in so drunk that it was I who led him to his bed."

Kennedy turned upon Karl with a sudden change of front.

"You come in here, looking for drink, and you appear to be my friend. Now you want to arrest me."

"I have said that I do not," Karl replied in a grumbling voice. "You may rot for all that I care."

"Let the *Herr Feldwebel* arrest me," he said, "I am not of this country, I am a decent river-man, and as for last night it is not any affair of yours."

The sergeant lolled over the bar, and Magda poured him out a drink.

"I don't know that I shall take you," he said contemptuously.

"This man," Kenny pointed to Karl, "said that he would arrest me himself because he was first here."

The sergeant pushed out his heavy underlip.

"It is a police affair," he said after some reflection. "I shall warn the police. You are only a cowardly civilian, and shall be dealt with by the *turteltauben* who do not go to war like men."



Kennedy turned again to Karl and held out his hands.

"Arrest me," he said in a challenging voice. "You have said that you would; now do it."

Karl shook his head and joined the sergeant at the zinc-covered bar.

"While you warn the *polizei* I will keep my eye on this beggar," he suggested. "I suppose the patrol will go the full round?"

"I shall not put myself out for him," said the sergeant. "On the return I pass the police-station, and there I will lay information. What is the man's name?"

Kennedy, who had relapsed into silence, and shot angry glances towards Karl, made no reply.

"A man from Scheveningen, lodging at the *Ewige Lampe*," said the sergeant, who was by now more or less indifferent on the subject. "He will not escape. And you, Karl, will remain until he is taken into custody."

"I will stay here," said Kennedy, speaking more quietly. "What is a night in the cells? I have slept there well before this."

He walked to the table, still looking at Karl.

"Send him away," he said, "and tie me up if you like, so that I shall not escape; put me in handcuffs."

The *Feldwebel* was amused at so much show of temper.

"Karl Haff is a good man; why do you hate him?"

"Tie me up," persisted Kenny; "do anything, only send that corporal out of this."

At any cost he felt that he must not involve Karl Haff now. If he were arrested the truth would certainly become known, and Karl, having been found in his company, would pay the extreme penalty for aiding his country's enemies. Kennedy was cold with fear, but he hid his feelings behind a laugh.

"Ach, then, *Herr Feldwebel*, who can give full

reasons for all his dislikes? After all, I am for the cells in any case. There is no escape for me, and you, being a fine, kind man, could well spare me a little pity. I shall have a drink while I can," he turned to Magda, "and I will be warm while I can. As for running away, I have nowhere to run to, because my steamboat left during the hours that I was absent, and I am homeless. At worst, I get three days, and then home. What do I care? But, even so, I will choose my company so long as it is possible. Put that dirty corporal outside."

The *Feldwebel* suddenly came to a conclusion. The man was drunk, and, though he carried his liquor well, he was none the less drunk. He was more and more diverted.

"I must be back at my *Kasernen* within half-an-hour," said Karl, "but, until then, I will remain here in charge."

"*Nein, nein,*" said the sergeant, "you do not understand. This man is drunk, drunk as a sow. I can tell." He turned to Magda. "Are you afraid of him?" he asked.

She shook her head, and continued to wipe a glass.

"Then, *auf wiedersehen,*" he said, putting down his mug with a thump on the counter, "I won't ask you to stay, corporal, neither will I leave any of the patrol."

"It is said," interposed Magda suddenly, "that an English officer was seen near to the *Ost Wall* no later than twilight."

"Then why could you not say so before?" asked the sergeant roughly. "You let me waste my time over a drunken sailor who is of no account." He blew his whistle loudly at the back door, which opened into the garden, and the men came running in.

"To the *Ost Wall,*" he shouted, and, without making any further delay, he pushed through the door, followed by the soldiers.

When he had gone, Magda threw her apron over her head and uttered stifled cries.

"I thought he would take you to the jail," she sobbed, "I thought he would take you to the jail."

"So did I," agreed Kennedy. "Now, Karl, you'll be late in relieving the guard."

## CHAPTER XXIX

KENNEDY leaned over the bar and took Magda by the wrists. She was going to have hysterics, and he must stop it at once. Whether she believed him to be an English officer, a drunken Dutchman, or a mysterious refugee, sheltered by Brüderich, he could not attempt to guess. She had come up to the scratch quite admirably, and he knew that she was to be trusted. If he escaped now, no one could blame her, and Karl Haff was safely out of the fear of self-betrayal.

"Magda," he said, "do you guess who I am?"

She put back the apron from her head and stared at him with her weak eyes.

"I think that if you shaved you would be very pretty," she said, with an elephantine effect of encouragement. "The *Feldwebel* frightened me; why did he want to take you to jail? And why did Karl Haff say you were drunk?"

"You were a very clever girl," said Kennedy, "and you answered him perfectly."

Magda reposed her matted head on his shoulder.

"Will you do something else for me?" he went on. Time was short and did not admit of much philandering with Magda.

"*Sie sind sehr komischer*," said Magda, and Kenny bowed his head and kissed her freckled forehead.

The patrol would not take very long on their rounds, and there was not a second to spare. Quite possibly the sergeant might have warned the policeman at the end of the street to watch the *Ewige Lampe*, and he must act at once.

"Do you see that coat hanging on a peg behind the

door? Yes? And *Herr* Bröderich's best Sunday hat with it?"

Magda nodded and returned to her work.

"I like neither him nor his hat," she said, "he is a miser, and he puts much water in the beer."

"I thought he did," agreed Kennedy. "Tomorrow, Magda, I will take you for a walk, but tonight I have to go at once to the house of Kerna to get back my papers. They really were stolen."

"*Ja*," said Magda, "but you did not come home drunk, nor were you late."

"I lost them there this afternoon," said Kennedy rapidly; he had thought of a plan which he determined to put into execution on the spot.

"And you will really take me for a walk?"

"First, I must get my papers, or I go to jail." He pinched her, and caught her by the waist. "I am going to borrow Bröderich's hat and coat, and as I go down the steps you must run out and call after me: '*Herr* Bröderich, *Herr* Bröderich, do not forget to order the potatoes.'"

Magda laughed. "That will be very funny, but why must I?"

Kennedy spoke to her earnestly. "I am in trouble with the police if I cannot give them these silly bits of paper; it may be that there is a *polizeimann* outside even now, waiting out there in the dark like a bogey, to jump at me and catch me by the neck. If I go to the cells there will be no walks for you and me."

"What have you done?" asked the servant breathlessly. "Have you murdered a man, *was?*" She was more intrigued than horrified by the idea, but she stood and admired him openly.

"There was a fight this afternoon," said Kennedy, inventing glibly, "I took a chair and hit another man over the head, but I meant no harm. If they go to the house of Kerna all this will be known; that is why I have to get there first by myself. I left the papers

under a candlestick, and no one had seen them. When I get back here I will be able to hand them over, and you and I will go out."

"*Mein Gott*, you must go quickly," said Magda, "and if any one comes I will tell them lies."

"Tell them any amount of lies," said Kenny, "but also tell them that *Herr* Bröderich has just gone out, and that I am in bed and asleep. Lock my door on the outside and throw the key away. It will be some time before they break it open, and, if you manage well, they may even go away and leave it all until morning. Keep my secret for me, Magda."

She clung to his arm.

"I will do anything for you, if only you come back. They shall not catch you while Magda is here to fool them. I am not stupid, *mein Herr*."

Kennedy held her by the elbows and kissed her again, without a qualm this time; he was beginning to think that Magda was an angel, and he told her so; she was the angel of the *Ewige Lampe*.

"If Bröderich asks for his hat and coat——" he began.

"I will say that I put them away upstairs, and he will not think of them before Sunday."

Kennedy rammed the soft hat over his ears, and put his own peaked cap into his pocket. He took one look round the room and another brief farewell of Magda, and then, pulling the door open, went out into the street.

It had become quite dark, and the fog from the river was growing thicker every moment. Its gauzy wrappings made a good shelter, and, as he descended down the shaft of light, full of swimming, luminous vapour, he saw a dark figure step forward from the opposite side of the street. The house was certainly being watched in front, and equally, so Kennedy felt, at the back.

He did not hurry, but fumbled in his pocket for a

second, until the man came closer, and then he turned at right angles, just as the voice of Magda cut into the steaming night.

"*Herr Brüderich, Herr Brüderich*, do not forget to order the potatoes."

The policeman fell back again, and Kennedy knew that he had passed through the first cordon of watchful eyes.

He walked on, not knowing in what direction he was going, but eager to get out of the town. So long as he was in Crefeld, and even when he had left it far behind, he was in extreme danger. His description would be published everywhere, and his blue serge was no longer the smallest protection to him. Over and above this, the coat and hat which were the property of Brüderich would be also a trap and not a defence, and he must keep away until he could by some means make himself look different.

He plodded on through the town, following the *Ost Wall*. So far as he could follow any bearings in the thickness of the night he knew that the Duisburg road lay in front of him, and that if he could once strike it he was at least following the main direction which he sought.

A long, steady plod took him out of the town, without either mishap or disaster, and he gained the bend of the Rhine which curves inwards by the town of Urdingen. He knew that at least his powers of endurance were to be tested, and he was now cut off from any outside help.

The situation looked black enough, for the Dutch sailor was as much a marked man as Kennedy Gleeson in his uniform would have been, and he wondered what line he should adopt. He had come away without food, but, as he had dined quite well at three o'clock, which was the dinner-hour at the *Ewige Lampe*, he did not feel any pangs of hunger. Brüderich's Sunday overcoat was a thick one and kept him

warm, and he had a sound pair of boots on his feet.

Through the darkness he saw the dotted lights of Urdingen, and the road was empty, for, in the country, the people were all within doors. He must avoid Urdingen at all costs, and sleep where he could for a few hours. If he found a barn in some outlying land he might have to stay there all the next day and continue his journey by night. Duisburg was a big town, with a large waterside population, and if he could manage to get there without attracting any notice, it was possible that fate would play into his hand again. The cards he now held were certainly not encouraging, but Kennedy's spirits were high, and he felt that he might back his own luck.

He had grown tired and footsore by the time he had skirted round Urdingen, and the fields on either side of the road were vast and empty. He walked on by the river path on his right, and could see the dim outlines of barges moored along the banks; and now and then the light of fires from the floating houses of the bargemen spoke of warmth and comfort, all hopelessly out of his own reach. He had life, a suit of clothing, and liberty, and he intended to fight for that.

There was no fire in that land for him to warm himself at, and he began to think of Castle Glenfield and Adrigole. What was Elodie doing, and when was he going to see her again? The world looked so large under the night sky, which was now clearing, for stars appeared overhead, and he could see the outline of endless silent woods, running like a wall to his left. There was no use going on in a vague, indefinite way, and though he knew that he must put as much distance as was possible between himself and Crefeld, he ought to formulate some plan.

He lessened his pace and walked more slowly. What was the logical point of view to take, he asked himself? Suppose, for instance, that he was an



escaped German, wandering through England, and walking along a road at night with the Thames on one side and open country on the other, and a town, such as Oxford, ahead, where he wanted to get food, even if he might not risk a lodging. The police would know that there was an escaped prisoner in the neighbourhood, but the majority of the people would not know. You might walk into a shop, and, provided that your manner was quite natural, and that you gave no reason for suspicion, no one need suspect anything. There were environs where there were the more or less wealthy families, who also would know nothing about you. The chief thing to do was to carry something. The idea came to Kennedy suddenly.

If he still wore Brüderich's coat, with his own cap, he would pass as a well-to-do workman easily enough. He was known to no Secret Service Department and he ought to be able to out-intrigue the average German townsman, but he must have an obvious reason for being where he was. As he walked on, listening to the voice of the river, he tried to remember what men did carry. Bundles of tools—but that was out of the question; coils of rope—easier to come by, but still rather far out of reach; planks, ladders, gas pumps. . . . Kennedy found himself laughing at the idea. His boots would be thick in mud, and his whole appearance unkempt. He looked far too young to be out of the army, unless for some reason which would strike the eye, and it seemed to him that to be lame was probably the best solution of the difficulty. His long trudge was already taking the skin off his feet, and he would be able to assume a limp which would convince any one that he was disabled for war service. The next point was, to give no one long enough to think about him in detail. He had made a bad mistake at the *Ewige Lampe*, and he did not intend to repeat it. If he could collect enough food in Duisburg to take him on to Orsoy, he need not go near any

human habitation until he left Orsoy, which had once been a fortress town, behind him. He had then to pass a long tract of marshy land, and Brüderich had said that the biggest town between Orsoy and Wesel was Rheinberg, where you drank "Boorekamp" bitters.

How intolerably far away everywhere was from the next place when you had to walk, and he recalled Pal-liser singing a parody of Tipperary, and the words came back to him:

It's a lang, lang way tae Auchterlochie,  
It's a lang, lang way tae Pairth—  
It's a lang, lang way frae onywhere  
Tae onywhere else on Airth.

He forgot how it went on. And then he began to think of stories of escapes which he remembered, when Mary of Scotland had been hampered by lovers; and Marie Antoinette had, like Teddy, required too much comfort. The wider your scope the better, and the more humble you appeared the less chance there was for you to be caught. It was like walking over the net of the fowler, and every footstep counted and every detail was of huge importance. He wondered if they had all felt alike, all the fugitives of the world, and if they had been subject to moments of fancied security and, other times when fear shadowed them closely and touched their flesh with icy fingers. Once having begun, there was no end to it, and no rest until it was over. One was bringing one's own life to its second state of being with pangs and anguish. His mind wandered back years and years, and he remembered how his mother had read him stories of adventure which had fired his young imagination. He recalled the drawing-room at Castle Glenfield, and the light coming in from under the striped sun blinds outside, while he had sat with his head against her knees, listening with concentrated attention. She had read him so many books, when she her-

self, unknown to him, must have been facing her own death, but the books were all instinct with life and they had accentuated his own love of danger. He had loved danger always, and now he was getting his full share.

The night was beginning to wane already, and it was very much colder. Soon he would have to discover some shed where he might hide away again, and go on into Duisburg after twilight the next day. He told himself that he must make quite sure that he "took off" at the right second. There was that slashing mare "Jewel" he had once owned, and she invariably "took off" an eighth of a second too soon, and very nearly broke her owner's neck. It was a fatal fault, and one he was likely to fall into out of his own slashing way of dealing with obstacles. He wished that he had the mare now, or Lean Jane. What had happened to Jane? It must have been all right, because none of that crowd had turned up anywhere in Germany. Jane had got through and given the alarm. God! how long ago it all was. What a huge number of events had scarred deep into his own soul since then. There was so much that he wanted to forget; faces he had seen which haunted him, awful cries of pain, and the destruction of men's bodies in the hospital ward. These things must be forgotten, and he supposed that one would forget.

The dawn grew grey, and he saw the dim outlines of things more clearly than he altogether liked. A motor lorry came tearing down the road, followed by six others, the headlights casting wide concentrated rays in advance, but Kennedy did not seek shelter, he only stood aside, and was splashed to the ears by the passing of the heavy transport, and then he went on again.

The road began to play tricks with him, and it took on the false semblance of roads he knew. He was to become very familiar with this illusion, and it was

full of bewilderment, for he felt now and then as though he was walking along a well-known path, leading past the Fox Rock covert, and bringing him in close to the Adrigole stables. How could these things be? He began to look out for landmarks, Ryan's forge and the derelict mill, where the road divided and went on over the hills sacred to Larry's Harriers in one direction, and, in the other, turning past a big, imposing house, owned now by a farmer. He caught himself at this queer employment more than once and checked his overstrung fancies. Later on he understood it better, and discovered that it was the result of fatigue and hunger, and that, if the conditions continued sufficiently long, he became encircled by a company of people who were ghostly but quite real. You could even talk to them, and they replied.

He shook off the sensation with an effort, and, at the far end of a distant field, he saw the outlines of a farm. It was a place of considerable size, and there must be outbuildings somewhere in the vicinity, so he followed the track leading away from the road and took his bearings again. The people in the farm were still asleep, and Kennedy, who dreaded an attack from a dog, was relieved to find that only a friendly old sheep-dog kept the courtyard at the back. He was inclined to bark, and gave a growl, but the touch of Gleeson's hand on his head made him alter his opinion; he knew that the stranger was at least a friend to dogs, and he welcomed him with frantic wriggling and wagging of his tail.

"I'm afraid you'll give me away, old man," Kenny said softly; "one's friends do that at times out of love;" and he went on to the farthest of the houses in the yard. He was dreadfully hungry by now, and, as he passed the chicken-house, he wondered if he dared go in and see if there was an egg in one of the nests; but, whatever you could do with a dog, chickens were kittle-cattle in a difficulty, and he did

not like to venture. At the farthest end of the yard there was a hay barn, and Kennedy climbed up a ladder, leading through an opening in the floor above. There were horses stabled near, and the smell of the stables awakened a whole host of dreams. Once he got into the deep, soft warmth of the dried hay he was conscious that he must be pretty nearly beat, and that, whatever came of it, he intended to stay there and sleep.

It was pitch dark in the loft, and there were no windows. The hay tickled his face and got down his neck, but it was blessedly clean and fragrant, and it seemed to embrace his tired body and offer him the deep joy of limitless repose. He had slept in so many far worse places, and under such ugly conditions, that his thankfulness was great, and he covered himself up until he was completely hidden. If any one came and looked for him he intended to hold the entrance and sell his liberty dearly, and, if they took anything of him, it would only be his body, for he made a contract with himself that he would not again fall into German hands alive.

## CHAPTER XXX

**T**EDDY HARRINGTON was back again in London, and he was haloed about with the most wonderful colours of romance. Lady Gertrude had made preparations for him to join her in the house in Hill Street, but her son thought otherwise, and no amount of either persuasion or slightly heated argument could induce him to change his own ideas. He was going to live at the Albany and do work at the War Office, and he made no secret of the fact that his mother's ideas about housekeeping did not agree with his own.

In fact, Teddy was not any longer in the least a biddable, tractable son, outwardly, as he had been in those golden days when he depended upon his mother's influence to keep him supplied with sufficient money for his needs. The engagement between him and Elodie had been broken off, and Lady Gertrude had put her own complexion on the story; but whether she did or not, it had not really made her mind majestically calm, and she was aware that Queen Victoria would have managed better. She was also in the dark as to what Teddy was really doing, and her suspicions were aroused. Though all official recognition of his engagement was ended, Teddy was still upon friendly terms with Elodie; they had been seen together in the Park and at theatres. Lady Gertrude imagined that there might be the faint hope of matters reorganizing again. She could not hear that Teddy had attached himself to any one else, and so she was uncomfortable, but not really alarmed.

Teddy himself was in a curious frame of mind. The knowledge that Edith was free had at first filled

him with a sense of extravagant satisfaction. If you are not married to the lady of your heart there are so many small difficulties to contend with, and he wanted everything to be easy. One had to dodge the *convenances* to a certain extent, even if you entirely disregarded them, and it meant a lot of extra worry. Once he was married to Edith he could take her everywhere with him, and people would soon stop talking. No one could talk for ever, not even his mother's pious and ill-natured collection of friends. It could not matter what any one thought so long as you got what you wanted, and Teddy came back on the wings of love, ready to believe that Edith was his all in all. Edith in her grey clothes and her renewed beauty was enough to make any man well content, and Teddy would have been content if he had not broken everything off with Elodie.

Elodie had ended their engagement with a sweetness and graciousness which was so gentle that it hardly felt like a hurt. She asked him to come to see her, and he detached himself from Edith and went.

"I expect she will give me the chuck," he said, returning to kiss Edith once again; "it is far better so. We never loved each other, Elodie and I, but we were good friends, and I think we can go on like that."

Edith made no reply. She was ever excellent at a silence.

He found Elodie in the little flat, looked after now by Julia Lane, the cook from Castle Glenfield, and Julia was in herself an armed guard, a chaperone, and a friend.

She knew Teddy of old, and had not any very high opinion of him, and she adored Kennedy with a savage and tigerish devotion. Her hair was grey and her eyes keen and bright; she had been the best-looking girl in the barony, and she was now a very striking woman of well over middle age.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" she said, as she opened the

door to Teddy. "How well you got out of jail yourself and left Master Kenny behind you."

"He will be back sooner or later," said Teddy, with the equanimity of one who is not deeply concerned.

"And if he is, it's not you he may thank," remarked Julia, as she took his coat and hung it on a peg. "Glory be to God, Captain Harrington, it's a fine world, indeed. Master Larry in France with the leg in shatters, as you may say, Master Kennedy in prison, and yourself here as clean as ninepence. I'm told you got a medal," she opened the door and showed him in, continuing her conversation; "what did they give you the like for doing?"

Teddy laughed, and stood admiring Julia.

"For gallantry in the field, or so they said."

"Gallantry in a field," remarked Julia with a sniff, "more likely in some one's best parlour. I know the sort of gallantry you'd be up to, if you understand me. Glory be to God! Gallantry in a field." She swept away and called to Elodie in her loud and piercing voice, and Teddy could hear it diminishing as she opened Elodie's door and informed her that a guest had come. "It's that fine young box of tricks, Captain Harrington; sure, don't I always say it's the best as gets taken and the 'Come all ye's' who haven't a scratch to their skin."

Teddy limped to the fire. He was slightly nettled, and he always limped a little more than usual when he was annoyed, but he brightened up again when Elodie came into the room. She looked marvellously young and sweet, and all the airs of heaven and fairyland seemed to be blowing around her. He was relinquishing all this for Edith, and at that moment it appeared a great deal. She took his hand, and they smiled at each other in a friendly way, and then Elodie sat down and became serious.

"I want to put it in the papers that everything is ended," she said; "it is getting awkward, Teddy, and



I think it is time that outside people knew. Only today," she laughed in spite of herself, "I had a wedding present. A perfectly hideous bracelet, from your aunt, Lady Hilmer. She surely knows that we have broken it off."

"I suppose it must end," he said reluctantly.

Elodie looked at him with surprise.

"I know everything," she said slowly, "Edith Ransome told me. Don't feel that you ought to say that kind of thing, Ted; there isn't the least need. Besides, I have been in love with Kenny ever since I went to Ireland that time, so neither of us have any ground for complaint."

Teddy sat looking at her. He felt rather as though she had boxed his ears, quite kindly, but still it stung a little.

"Yes," he said, "there is Edith, of course."

It was not how he should have put it, but it was all he could think of.

"She is very beautiful," went on Elodie, "and, Ted, I think that she is quite the most fascinating woman I have ever seen. I used to think of her as being rather cruel, and then one day I met her and had tea with her, and I began to understand how she must make every one else seem so tame. She isn't a bit like what I thought she was at first—a kind of 'Bella Donna,'—and I am sure, now, that you are right." She knelt down and put a block of wood on the fire. "She is wonderful, Teddy. You can't really judge her by any of the ordinary rules."

Teddy blinked his eyes. He knew all this quite well, and yet his heart was not light.

"I am very lucky," he admitted, "but all the same, Elodie, I wish it had been the other way. I could give you a good time now, and, if Edith hadn't come in, we might have made a very decent thing of it."

"One can't choose whom one will love, I suppose," she said reflectively, "it wouldn't be a bit of use if

one could, and as for a 'good time,' well, that is all an accident. I've been so miserable about Kenny. Tell me everything you can of him, Ted, my poor heart is so empty of news."

Teddy took her hands in his, and his eyes were kind and troubled.

"I was not there very long, but Kennedy was popular. You know the way that people like him, El; he just held the place together, with a chap called Palliser. Between them they did a lot for the rest. I'm afraid my own share wasn't a bit heroic. Looking back, one feels damned sorry. . . . I loathed it so, but it was every bit as bad for him and the others. I never got back to the *Husaren Kasernen*, and the *Lehrerseminar* was a kind of Hell. Kenny had been there, too, and they remembered him. They spoke awfully well of him, El; I know you'd like to hear that, and, sooner or later, there is bound to be an exchange of prisoners, and he will get back. You and he will be happy in the end."

"Sooner or later," Elodie echoed sadly, "but it seems a very long time, Ted, and one is often lonely."

He squeezed her hands hard between his own, and looked at her brimming eyes. He was moved himself, and he wanted to comfort her, if only there were any way in which it could be done.

"God knows," he said, "the war has made life fearfully hard."

"Then I shall have the announcement put in the papers," said Elodie, with an effort to recover herself.

"When are you and Edith to be married?"

"Not yet," he said. "Edith says in about six months from now. Of course, directly my mother gets wind of it there will be a row, and there will be any amount of opposition. Radley will butt in, and, because he got me out of Germany, he thinks he owns my soul."

"Opposition can't matter," said Elodie, going back

to her seat on the sofa. "She will help you enormously in anything you may do later on. I hope you will be very happy, Ted."

Teddy got up and pulled down his smart waistcoat and regarded his boots, and Elodie handed him a little box.

"That's the ring," she said listlessly, and he put it into his pocket, feeling depressed and sad. It was all over, and they were still very good friends, but it gave him a wretched sensation of loss which remained with him for many a day.

For Elodie there was nothing to do but wait, and the gap in the arrival of Kennedy's letters was becoming ominous because of its length. She was always nervous now, and much of her old brave courage had evaporated. The days were endless, and the posts only a recurring disappointment. Nothing came, and it seemed as though a silence had descended like a dense fog between her and Kenny. Hil was not there to encourage her, and she missed her desperately. She did not even know when Hil would come back, for, though Larry was now out of danger, he was not fit to be moved. Probably he would always be lame, and, though he might be able to ride and get about, he would soldier no more. The Ministry and the "Batt" had gone for good, but there had been no time to think about all that yet. Hilda wrote, saying that she had met quite a lot of people she knew in Boulogne, and, among them, a mutual friend called Stephanie Maynard. Hil was always interested in other people, and Stephanie had lost her husband early in the war, and surprised every one by her apparent heartlessness.

"I have come to understand her," she wrote to Elodie, "and, El, it is such a wretched thing to misjudge others. In fact, it isn't possible, so when one does, one is merely an ill-natured ass. Stephanie told me that; even yet she cannot let herself think of it. She said, 'I should go all to pieces, Hilda, if I did.

I hide it away until I get strong enough, or the war is over, and it doesn't matter then whether one breaks down and crumples up.' She says she doesn't care what people say about her, and that when you own a sorrow that simply covers the whole spread of your life there is only one way to tackle it, and that is to take up the bits and make the best of it. 'And so every one thinks me a woman without an ounce of feeling, but why should I mind?' She was so funny about it the other day, because the doctor was in a fiendish temper and went for her. Afterwards he explained that one of his sons had been killed and that allowances must be made; but no one makes any for Stephanie. She says that she is rather proud of the fact that people come to her and tell her that of course she 'can't understand' how hard things are for them. Women with their husbands in India, and others whose men are prisoners, all of them, pretty nearly, with a hope ahead, and none of them stop to think that Stephanie has nothing at all before her—just nothing. She said that all the married women whose husbands were at home on leave, or anywhere about, gathered them up and came to see her during the first ghastly bit, and no one ever imagined how they rubbed it in. I am writing all this about Stephanie because, out here and at home, people are always down on her, and, when you know, it is so unfair. No one ever 'made allowances,' and now she wants none."

Elodie read the letter and thought over what Hilda said. To each one the special suffering which they were called upon to bear appeared almost intolerable, but there was only one way, that was perfectly true. Hilda had tackled the circumstances with a fine, sensitive touch; she had lived through unspoken misery of mind, and had never permitted it to shadow the lives of the others with whom she was in contact; and at times she had been happy. Snatches of happi-

ness were permitted to every one. Stephanie had staggered those who knew her by her cheerfulness, and she was more utterly forlorn than the rest. Sorrow was changing the whole conception of things, and Elodie herself knew that her struggles were sincere; she, too, had tried to keep the burden on her own shoulders. You could not possibly explain everything in this world, and there was no use in making any such endless effort. It was no use to brood upon lost joys, and regrets over the bitterness of things were equally futile. The unflinching and dogmatic people who had theories, and the grumblers who grumbled so persistently that they actually got some good out of it, were born like that, and one might not imitate them. One had just to pretend. It was all one could do, for there was no anodyne, no soothing syrup for the ills of life. To go about spreading germs of melancholy and being an additional straw to pile on the loads carried by the rest was so unspeakably contemptible. There were green pastures and still waters; people such as Hilda knew at least how to direct others to the source of healing, and Stephanie, poor Stephanie, who continued to laugh and make herself an Aunt Sally for the vindictive, she, too, was so much bigger and better than any one really guessed.

Julia Lane was worried about Elodie, and she abused the postman. She was unable to see very far, and she attributed the persistent disappointment to that altogether innocent man.

"Don't be showing your ugly face here," she said time after time; "you're no good, man; why can't you bring a letter from Germany out of all that bundle of nonsense you carry?"

And at last the postman, who was becoming sensitive about his visits to the flat, and looked anxiously round the hall, hoping to escape from Julia, who knew his hours and kept tryst with him most faithfully, did bring a letter, hoping that it might placate her rancour.

"I don't write the letters," he said, as he handed it out. "I've never written a letter in my life; I know far too much about them."

Julia captured the letters and got into the lift. She was beaming with joy when she came into Elodie's room and handed her a small packet, just delivered.

"I knew that thief of the world would give it up, sooner or later, and I have him that scared now that he hardly dares show his nose inside the porch. It's my belief that the man is boozed."

Elodie took the letters eagerly, and looked in dismay at the envelope. The writing was not Kennedy's, and forebodings rushed in upon her with terrific violence. Her heart was beating furiously, and she tore the cheap envelope in pieces as her trembling hands seemed to have lost control; it was signed George Palliser, and the news was brief.

"We have reason to believe that Kennedy has escaped," he wrote, "and the *Kommandant* has given me permission to write and tell you of this. He has now been gone a week. With all my heart I pray that you may have news of him. He was very well when last I saw him, and in good spirits. How he got away no one can guess, and it is suspected that he must have flown over the wall, though when he did this or how remains a mystery. Let me know if you have any word of him, for, with increasing years (and the years here are unnecessarily long), I become nervous and irritable. I am very fond of Kennedy, and miss him. Room 24 is not what it was, and my gramophone has ceased to sing. However, no doubt, one will survive. I have all his belongings, and we have eaten his ration parcels as they came. If you should see him, tell him that we are all very cheery; he will understand."

Elodie stood with the letter in her cold hands. The shock had been acute, and she felt as though hope and fear were fighting a wild battle in her heart.

Kenny had escaped, but the dangers of his condition as a fugitive were likely to be terrific. She had longed and feared for this, and now that she knew that he had taken the extreme chance, she felt very close to the "crumpling up" moment—that awful hour when everything gives way, and courage tumbles through into a yawning abyss.

Suddenly she fell on her knees and hid her face in her hands, and prayed with a wild, wordless prayer that seemed to go up from her heart like flame. After a time she recovered herself a little; it was no use bargaining with God. She had offered everything in exchange for Kenny's safety, but it was no use. Would any angel accompany Kenny through the night and the danger, just because she so earnestly desired it? Things were not done like that. Somehow or other, and for reasons which no one could dream of, the causes were gathered together, and all one might really pray for was courage to endure whatever had to come. So much was lawful, and Elodie did not fully understand the desperate heroism of patience. She had to gather in the courage which not only requires that one shall endure oneself, but that one shall endure the anxieties and pains of others, and she loved Kennedy far better than herself.

It was a great, comprehensive test to which she was put, sitting composed and still, in the innermost recesses of her heart, and, if she could not bear her own share, she saw that she would be discredited and disqualified in her own eyes. Far away, before her, there was the clear shining of a great hope, and its light fell upon her, remote and distant though it was. She was ashamed of her own distress, and she routed the strong dread of the revenge of life. Hil had endured unbroken; Stephanie had gone on with a laugh, even if it rang a little hard, and a dumb sense of touching the hem of a healing mantle came upon her.

For her there was nothing to do but remain faithful to the hope which the letter had given her, and to beat off the raging wolves that hunted the souls of the weak. In a dim way, like a child who was just beginning to understand his letters, she saw that a wider vista was opening out before her. She, too, had something to add to the great sum of life's bravery; she could not protect Kenny with her own body or rush to stand between him and danger, but she would undertake her own part and find in it that queer touch of self-respect without which human nature is a hollow, useless fraud.

Elodie lifted her face and looked at the blue sky outside the window, and, though her eyes were still red from her passionate tears, she felt herself ready to accept whatever had to come.



## CHAPTER XXXI

**F**ROM the time when Kennedy awoke in the hay barn to the time when he made his escape from Duisburg he had not, as he afterwards said, had a "dull moment." All the morning he lay hidden, until the hunger which ate into him forced him to consider whether he could very well venture down into the yard and seek for food.

There were no windows in the loft, and only by approaching the opening could he discover whether people were about. The farmer had gone out early; he had heard him shouting to his team, and by mid-day the place seemed deserted, except for a persistent and scolding voice which he concluded to be that of the farmer's wife, who harangued her children and the servants. At mid-day, when they were all eating, Kenny thought, the voice became silent, and the yard quite still. He knew that the yard was not commanded by the back-door, and that he could get down there without being seen; but if he skulked, or looked as though he feared capture, there was no hope for him from the woman with the shrew's voice. At last he decided that he would try his luck, and he let himself down by the ladder and walked through a gaunt outhouse where some tools were heaped in a corner. He wondered whether he should borrow a spade, but Brüderich's coat did not suggest that he was a labourer, and he feared to strip it off and appear in his jersey and peaked cap. It was all very complicated, and he brushed himself clear of the hay-seeds and walked out into the sunshine. The yard was empty, and the chickens and ducks alone kept up a constant noise like the undernote of a symphony, and

Kennedy stood undecided. He could get out easily enough by the kitchen garden, and continue his walk along the road to Duisburg. He conceived a plan by which he might arrive there more easily, if he were to hail an up-going barge, for the bargemen would not have had time to be warned that such a person was about. But he was cruelly hungry, and he needed food.

"Who are you?" shouted the voice he had come to know so well from the door, and he turned and saluted politely. It was the *Bauerin*, and she looked like war.

"I am on my way to Duisburg," he replied; "I missed the steamboat and came here on foot. It is very unfortunate for me."

"I do not know who you are. You may be a drunkard or a thief," she replied in the same angry tones, and a crowd of small children clustered round her, watching Kennedy with evident hostility. "What brings you to my yard?"

"Hunger," said Kennedy, still with the same air of friendliness. "I was just coming to ask if you could give me a glass of milk."

"I give you a glass of milk?" She emerged from the house and appeared to have worked herself up into the extreme of rage. "I will give you the feel of my broom across your shoulders."

"That will not satisfy my appetite," Kennedy said with a laugh; "but, since I must seek elsewhere for hospitality, I wish you good-morning." He walked away and spoke over his shoulder. "I did not believe all the neighbours told me of you, *Frau Bauerin*, but now I see that it is true."

"What did they dare to say?" She came into the centre of the yard and followed Kennedy. "You shall not leave here until I know. What have they said with their evil tongues?"

"They said," Kennedy retorted deliberately, "that

you had a black temper, and that I should as soon find ice in hell as get a mouthful out of your house." He walked on again, and the woman threw her hands up in the air.

"The liars," she shouted, "the wicked liars. So they told you that?" She ran after him and caught his arm. "Was it the wife of Schmidt? Her with the squint and the fine gold ear-rings, for which she has not paid. *Ach*, I know the wretch."

"Yes, it was she," said Kennedy.

"Then come in," the woman gripped him with an angry hand, "and you shall go back to her and say that I have fed you with kartoffel soup, and bread of my own making. You shall go back and stuff her lies down her throat."

"I will," said Kennedy. "She shall swallow them all, and later on she shall come here and apologize to you, *Frau Bauerin*."

As she led him into the kitchen, the farmer's wife abused her neighbour with unabating zest. Ann Schmidt accused her of stinginess and a foul mouth; what about Ann Schmidt herself? What about her family? What about her conduct now that her husband was at the wars? Where did she get her golden ear-rings? Tell me that?" she screamed at Kennedy as she helped him to an enormous bowl of soup. "I am a decent woman, living quietly in my house. My sons are fighting for the Fatherland, and my husband is out on the land working all day. What time have I to go to Duisburg and to attend the fair like that trolloping cow? I tell you I am a decent woman, and I spit upon her."

Kennedy ate quickly and looked at his watch. He was relieved to find that the farmer was away on the land, but he had no wish to dally in the company of the *Bauerin*, who, now that her blood was up, appeared to desire to feed him with everything the house contained. He had made an extremely lucky hit, and

he knew that in all country places feuds go to form the main interest of life. So that, if you happen upon a feud, you need only remain a listener, and he ate the food provided him, thanking Heaven that all places are alike in this respect.

The *Bauerin* neither knew nor cared who he was, where he had come from, nor whither he was bound. She had special hatreds, and Ann Schmidt was one of them. There was nothing he did not know of Ann Schmidt's record of villainy. She was the Semiramis of the neighbourhood, and Kennedy thought how much George Palliser would have enjoyed her record. She went to fairs, and her conduct when she got there was a scandal. The *Pfarrer* had been approached, but somehow Ann Schmidt got round him. Trust her to get round a man.

"Did she not fool you? Perhaps you, too, are one of them?"

Kennedy denied the suggestion. He said that he thought nearly as badly of Ann Schmidt as the *Bauerin* herself, and this promoted him in her eyes to the extent of her making him a cup of coffee, and giving him a dozen potatoes to carry with him in case he could not get to Duisburg that night.

"You have a strange accent," she said, giving one of her young children a box on the ear for crowding close to Kenny. "What part are you from?"

"I am from Haarlem," he replied, "and my name is Frans Hals." He smothered down a laugh in his heart at the notion.

"Ach, a 'water beggar,'" the *Bauerin* said scornfully; "why do not you and your cowardly people fight for the Fatherland?"

"We shall do so," replied Kennedy, with a nod of great wisdom; "have you not heard the news?"

"News? What time have I for news? Do you take me for another Ann Schmidt? Is it then true that you are going to fight?"

"Certainly." Kenny took up his cap, for he was in a hurry to leave. "We are a great people, *Frau Bauerin*, we were made free by William of Nassau, a German. Is that not something to remember?"

He took his leave of her and said good-bye to the children, and, as he went out through the yard, he saw the figure of the worthy *Pfarrer* coming up, between the rows of neat stones, to the front door. Kennedy was not at all anxious to meet the *Pfarrer*, and he hurried away, taking the path which led him towards the river. He had managed to get food enough to carry him on for some time, and he faced the road again light-heartedly enough.

Time was of the utmost importance, and if he could only arrive at Duisburg before the alarm was given and the whole place on the look-out for him, it meant the saving of weeks probably in the matter of his crossing the frontier. Any story was good enough for people like the *Bauerin*, but he could not expect that he might continue to impose upon every second person he met. Once into Duisburg, he hoped to be able to get on to a river steamer which would take him to Emmerich, and Emmerich was just on the Dutch border.

There was a good deal of traffic on the roads, and it made him restless and uncomfortable. He knew that there was lurking danger in this mood, and so he broke away through a copse, and spent the rest of the day hidden in a damp, green, nest-like bower under the fir trees.

At nightfall Kenny ate his potatoes, thanking the *Bauerin* as he did so, and as he had managed to snatch a few hours of very uneasy sleep, he was fit for the road once more. He had taken off his boots to rest his feet, and the blisters stung and throbbed afresh as he walked across the long, ghostly fields to the road. When he got back to England, he thought, he would never want to walk again for the fun of the thing, and

though his courage was steady, his restless sleep had left him weary. By daylight he ought to make Duisburg, and even then a huge tract of country separated him from the frontier. Of course Karl Haff had been right, and the shortest way was sure to be far more dangerous.

By morning he had got into Duisburg, and as he walked towards the *Schlensenhafen* he wondered what he should do for himself in the way of procuring a lodging for the day. Duisburg had been transformed by war from a great industrial centre into a hive for munition works; all the blast furnaces and machine shops and the foundries were turning out shells; the dismal effect of the place struck Kennedy at once, and he disliked the look of the people whom he saw about, for the night-shifts were changing, and a crowd of munition workers were streaming home. He joined in with them, and slouched on into the poorer quarter of the town, no one taking the smallest notice of him, and he passed the Police Station with the weary men without suffering more than a passing qualm. His beard had grown sufficiently to disguise the lower part of his face, and he glanced at the large posters on the walls of the station, one of which, he knew, must be the official description of himself.

What he wanted was a shelter for the day, and he fancied that he might happen upon an empty house. Duisburg must have been affected tremendously by the war, and numbers of people had gone away. He turned up a side street, leaving his companions, who had most of them dispersed by this time, and struck onwards through a park where evidently soldiers were trained, for there were narrow trenches cut in the recreation grounds, and great wooden staples stuck at intervals, like goal posts, were hung with sacks of straw jabbed with holes by bayonet practice. The park was a wide one, and still deserted at that early hour, and on the further side Kennedy found himself

in a residential quarter of the town, where the well-to-do middle-class population lived. The houses were not large, but they were solid and comfortable, and some of them had basements. Before him, the milkman was going his rounds with a cart, and filling up jugs left outside kitchen doors. Kennedy followed him at a civil distance, and taking a jug from a closed house carried it on carefully. It was a good thing to have a quart of milk these hard times, he reflected, and he looked for the empty house he sought.

At last he discovered one which must have been vacant for some time, for the bushes had grown thick with neglect and the windows were deep in grime. The iron gate stood open, and he went in, closing it carefully behind him. Placing his jug on the ledge of a window, he walked round to inspect the house, and it presented a discouraging front. Only a small distance separated it from two occupied houses on either side, and in one the servants were already up and awake, for the windows were open and smoke came from the chimney.

Kennedy clambered into the area, but here all the windows were protected with iron bars, and he next tried the kitchen door in vain. If he were to break a window the noise might easily attract attention, and he could not venture to do anything which would make his presence known. He searched in an out-house and found a ladder, which he thought might help him, and placing it against a sheltered side of the house he climbed up, and, wrapping his hand in his handkerchief, broke a small pane of glass. The noise seemed terrific, and he held his breath and waited a second. The servant in the next house was singing, and she did not stop as though a thunderbolt had fallen, and after a moment his heart beat less violently, and he put his arm through the pane and lifted the sash.

In a second he was inside, and he found that the

house was furnished, and that, though it smelt cold and dank, it could afford him a very comfortable shelter. Inside the kitchen door there was a key, rusted in the lock, but capable of being made to turn; and opening the door he brought in the jug of milk and sat down at the table to think. He was safe for the moment, but his safety was entirely problematic. The sooner he could get out of Duisburg the better, and meanwhile he decided that he must sleep.

All day he slept or wandered through the house, and towards nightfall it began to rain. The rain was so persistent and heavy that twice he returned when he had opened the door. It would be better at least to begin the journey dry, and, even though he was furiously hungry, shelter made its own appeal to him, and he faltered. From the top window of the house he had watched the people going by earlier in the day, and while the light lasted, and now he was obliged to sit in utter darkness, without the least desire to sleep. The night was going to be interminable, and another day must follow, when if he could purloin another jug of milk to keep himself going he would be very lucky.

He grew restless and dissatisfied, and the house seemed full of noises and sounds which made him start and turn cold. Out in the open one did not feel the strain so acutely, but cooped up within walls it was intense.

He must have dozed again, when he awakened with a sudden start and listened. If the night was now clear he intended to go out and begin his journey again, and he knew that this was the last thought he had had before he grew drowsy and drifted off into a troubled dream, in which he repeated the anxieties of the day.

Before he had slept he imagined a dozen different noises in the house, and even in the room with him, and now he was sure, with an awful definiteness, that



he was no longer alone. There were footsteps in the room overhead, and voices, and a strong, steady draught was blowing in through the passage, which told him that the front door was standing wide. For a moment Kennedy was paralysed and could not stir, but after a little his wits returned to him and he stripped off his boots. If the owner of the house had returned, he was sure to visit the kitchen, so Kennedy must get out as quickly and noiselessly as possible. He could think of no explanation for his own presence in the house which would save him, and he got up, and, opening the kitchen door, waited for a second in the narrow passage outside. A door at the head of the staircase was open, and some one was carrying a lantern, which threw grotesque shadows around. Behind him there was a coal-cellar, and Kennedy debated whether he should walk through the hall and out into the night, or hide until the owner of the house was gone.

He made a slight noise as he moved, still in doubt, and the man in the room overhead heard him and spoke to his companion. He had startled them evidently, for the lantern was shut off and the voices lowered.

The mystery and the tension of the position half stifled Kennedy, and he decided against the coal-cellar. Suppose he did hide there; if they searched at all, they would never overlook any such possible place, and Kennedy felt that it was useless to depend upon it for protection. He sat down on a chair in the hall and began to pull on his boots again, singing to himself as he did so the words of the song which the sentimental orderly had sung to the Evening in the *Husaren Kasernen*.

Then he rallied his courage, quoting to himself, "*De l'audace, de l'audace, et encore de l'audace, et la France est sauvée.*"

"Hello, *Kamerad*," he shouted cheerfully, "I am

sheltering here against the weather. You have no objection, I suppose?"

A man emerged from the room and held the light over his head.

"None at all, provided that you do not stay long," he said, in a voice which was far from steady.

"Can I be of any help to you?" asked Kennedy. "I have a lame leg, it is true, but you appear to be packing up."

He caught sight of a woman's figure behind the man, who was a large, prosperous-looking citizen, well fed and well clothed, and they looked at each other curiously.

The man turned and spoke to the woman in a low voice, and she replied emphatically that she wanted nothing. Kennedy felt at once that they were nearly as frightened as he was himself, so he got up and walked to the foot of the staircase.

"I should like to be of use," he remarked. "I thought the house deserted, and as a poor soldier is never welcome inside the doors of the rich, I came here. Once the night clears I go on again, for I am to present myself at the foundry for work in the morning. . . ." He curbed himself, in case he were explaining too much.

The man was keeping a composed front, but the woman was obviously becoming more and more alarmed, and she pulled her companion back from the staircase to the room.

"Look here," said the man, after another whispered consultation, "we don't want you here. . . ."

"Surely, *mein Herr*," interrupted Kenny quickly, "I know your face very well."

"If you do," he turned again to the woman and quieted her with a movement of his hand, "that is one of the things it is better for you to forget. Here," he said angrily, "clear out. This house is my prop-

erty, and you are a tramp. I shall hand you over to the police."

"*Ach*, it is always so," said Kennedy, retorting in a voice of disgust; "we fight for you, we die for you, and you call us tramps. In any case, *mein Herr*, I will not betray you, or the *gnädige Frau*, it is all no business of mine," and, turning away, he walked through the front door and closed it behind him with a bang.

"Their consciences aren't very clear," he thought to himself, and he smiled. It had been a near thing—far too near for comfort—and he decided that for no consideration would he go near any other town. He must try to make his way sheer through the country, and get what he could from the farmers and cottagers as he went. The roads near the empty house were deserted, as it was late, and Kennedy ran until he came into the streets again. He knew the line which he was to take, and he continued in the northerly direction.

Now he was among men and lights again, and his old fears arose, but he beat them off, and as he passed the open door of a *Bierhaus* two German soldiers came lurching out. One of them knocked into Kennedy, and immediately struck out at him; he was three parts drunk, and quarrelsome. At once he decided that Kennedy was his foe, and that he was a suspicious character; then the two men hauled him under the arc of light from the shop, and tore his cap from his head.

"I am not easily frightened," Kenny said, as one of the soldiers pinioned him by the arms. A crowd began to collect from the loiterers and the men from the wharves, and Kennedy gazed around him wildly, for he felt that at last an inevitable fate had caught him up. There were no other soldiers about, and from the look of the crowd he judged them to be mostly colliers, bargemen, and munition workers. He remembered what Karl Haff had told him, and he made his last throw.

"Men, are you going back on a comrade?" he shouted. "Isn't there one among you who will stand up for me?"

"Any river-men here to stand up for a comrade?" cried a voice in reply, and at that the innkeeper ran out.

"For the love of God, no rioting," he said imploringly. "For the love of God, friends, be quiet. See," he took Kennedy by the arm and pulled him into the shop, "if we get the police here, there will be trouble."

The soldiers were struggling in a sudden, desultory street-fight which had sprung up, and the innkeeper wrung his hands.

"It is Adolf Kreutzer, the socialist," he said, "and he is only just liberated from prison. I will shut my doors."

He ran quickly to the entrance and barred it across, and then extinguished all the lights except for one small lamp. The fight outside was extending, and loud cries could be heard.

"It is always like this," said the distracted innkeeper; "our river-men hate the soldiers; we are democratic down here."

"Let me out at the back," said Kennedy. He was hatless, and his jersey had been torn between friends and foes, and all he desired was to get away as quickly as possible before the police came.

The innkeeper pushed him into a passage and opened a door into a lane. Already the police were coming, and the whole quarter seemed alive with noise and violence. Adolf Kreutzer was making a demonstration, and they were all likely to be kept busy for some time; none of them would know nor ask whither the original cause of the commotion had vanished. He hurried on through the back streets, avoiding all main thoroughfares, until, by daybreak, he was safely out of Duisburg.

## CHAPTER XXXII

**F**OR more than a week Kennedy kept on his journey. He was nearly starving, and often the only food he got was what he could gather in the lonely fields. He was desperately tired and weary, and it seemed as though ages had passed even since he left Duisburg. After a little he lost all count of time, and he grew afraid of the distant sight of human habitation.

The noise of carts going over the cobbled roads struck him with cold fears, and once, when he had ventured down to the great main road, he saw a regiment of soldiers marching towards him. The dread silhouette of a German soldier's helmet made him hide for days, and he only continued his journey now by night. The going was bad, and the country was boggy in the low-lying ground. It seemed at times as though he would starve, and lie in a ditch until death came and released him. His clothes were wearing out and his boots were in holes; his hair and beard had grown into a kind of bush, and from this his blue eyes looked out of a gaunt, white face.

During one night's journey he ricked his ankle badly, crossing a deep drain, and for the whole of the next day he lay in the bog beyond unable to move. It was then that dreams came to him, and he fancied he saw people whom he knew. The weather treated him kindly enough, for the frost held off, and though it was wet and at times rain fell persistently for days, he was not frozen during the nights. Brüderich's coat had been taken from him in Duisburg, and he had nothing but the drenched clothes he wore, and

he had forgotten to wind his watch, so that he became ignorant of and indifferent to the passing of time.

For days he fed on turnips and small cabbage, which he gathered in the fields, varied by beetroot, and once he had luck and wandered into an orchard, where there were still a few late pears hanging on the trees. In one farm he had been able to steal some eggs. After that he began to pass out of the cultivated country towards Birten, and he knew that, on the opposite side of the Rhine, he must be near Wesel.

He had traversed half the distance between Crefeld and the Dutch frontier, but he was growing very weak, and he knew that each day his progress lessened and shrank. He tried approaching little isolated farms by night and gathering up any refuse thrown out into the tubs, which he suspected were there for the pigs; but what did that matter? The main thing which held in his mind was the fact that he was at liberty, and that he was now so wild and unkempt to look at that his old system of bluff was not of the smallest use. To appear anywhere, would be immediately to collect a crowd, and the only way left was to get across the frontier and give himself up as soon as he was into Holland. By day he dreamed of the thick strands of electric wire which shut in the territory where he was. Every foot of the border was protected by three fences, at least twelve feet high and fourteen feet wide, and sentries guarded it closely, accompanied by savage dogs. In his tired brain the thought of the last great effort became like a world weight, and though his immediate surroundings were bad enough to give him hourly subject for thought, the barbed-wire fence, charged with death, was like an abiding and evil dream which never varied.

He saw himself clear of everything and master of all his difficulties until he reached a point from where he could see into Holland, and the border would not be a stone's throw from him, and then the sentry

would pass and his chance come. Sometimes he thought of climbing one of the great stanchions, and, at other times, of digging under the wires, but, whichever way of escape presented itself to him, he always awoke, caught fast in the wires, and streaming with sweat. He had thought of another plan, by which he intended to swim from Elten, still keeping along the western bank of the Rhine, and so get to Dutch territory, but he knew that every day his strength was becoming exhausted. The loneliness hardly troubled Kennedy now, and he completely lost count of time. He seemed to have wandered for years in this strange desolation, and he knew that he was ill, but, again, that hardly mattered. He had gone past the stage when he could care, and the hours which came like a blessed relief to him, when he was vaguely aware that his mind wandered, were grateful, since, for a little, he was able to forget.

| Sleeping and waking, wandering onwards and onwards through the interminable nights, living like a pariah dog, and fighting with his own ever-increasing listlessness, Kennedy Gleeson battled on. He knew that the weather conditions were going to change soon, and that, if the winter opened with a snowfall, he was doomed.

All one night, as he dragged himself out of a bed of wet leaves to continue his pilgrimage, it rained, a heavy, sleeting rain, which went through his worn clothing like a torrent through tissue-paper. He was barefooted, and his feet were cut and bruised by the stones, and all his old power of laughing at himself had left him—deserted him in his sorest need. He knew the direction, and his old hunting instinct remained faithful, so that at least he was spared having to cover the same distance twice. He thought that it must now be going on for a month since he had spoken to a living soul, and suddenly he became aware that, though he was plodding barefooted through a howling

storm, his mind was alive and going over every incident of his experiences since he had been taken prisoner. His wound ached and burned, and he felt the jolting of the cattle-truck, he saw the room behind the station where Geldern had offered his coarse insults to the men who were ranged against the wall, and then he was swept into the agony of the *Lehrerseminar*. Sights he desired to forget were all acted anew under his eyes. There had been the incident of the man whose leg was one raging sore, and who had thrown himself out of his bed and lain in a welter of blood, and had been left to lie, until Kennedy and another wounded man had done what they could to assist him. The smells, the sounds, and the sights were with him again, and the horror which he had lived through, yet kept sane, was loosed once more. Still he plodded on, with bent head and weary, bleeding feet. Once more the doors of the Common Lager were opened to receive him, and the foul piteousness of the life within stalked gaunt and naked under his eyes. If he failed to escape, he would return to this; and surely anything else was better.

He was so tired, and there was nothing to help him. The cold rain fell in merciless fury on his bare head and drenched body, and he was so hungry that he did not want to eat. A fever was raging in his blood, and he longed for the deep rest of unconsciousness. He was going up a hill now; the rise of ground took it out of him horribly, and he remembered how, that morning, he had looked at his arms and hands, and thought that very soon he would be like a living skeleton. He had seen many of them in the Common Lager, and yet they had received some food and a little warmth. Life held on to one so hard if you were young and healthy and did not really want to die; but there must be an end somewhere, and not very many days ahead.

Kennedy set his teeth and fought on; he was at



the top of the rise now, and a wood fronted him, as well as he could make out through the sleet. The sleet itself was a little less keen and came softer and softer, until he realized that it was snowing hard, and the world was full of soft, feathery flakes, which blinded him and gathered on his shoulders. So God had sent the snow, and the game was pretty nearly up. A sense of anger came into the broken medley of his thoughts. He was playing against such huge odds, and nothing came to assist him in the least; it was hard to have to pit the naked, civilized body, devoid and bereft of its defences, against hunger, cold, and now, the last torment, of snow. There was a world full of warmth and food, and he was shut out from it all, and, besides that, he was dreadfully tired. He made no effort to protect himself, and when he went through a gate into a fir wood, he kept on along the cart track and sought nothing from the trees—the trees which had heretofore always been his friends.

It was just possible that he might find a charcoal-burner's hut somewhere, and be able to remain there the next day, living on a few acorns which he had in his pocket, and get a rest, but even that chance was a remote one; and, unless he came upon it without search, he did not think that he would go to seek for it. He would go on, that was the main thing, and the restless misery of his body cried aloud to him for help. The fir woods stretched for a long way—he knew that, for he had seen them from his last shelter—and, though he now only walked very slowly, he had got over an open tract and into shelter once more.

Broken fragments of fancy followed each other through his mind, fleeting and hopelessly incoherent, and the underlying sense of struggle and pain was always behind everything else. Fear seemed to be routed, and he did not think whether he should meet a foe who would hand him over to justice any more; he was repeating old dreams and seeing known places,

and always trying to find some quiet spot where he would be away from the wind and the wet, and away from the blinding, muffling snow. Sometimes he thought he heard bells ringing. The bells of Duisburg or the bells of Wesel—or was it that queer little cracked bell in the church of Castle Glenfield? Now and again it was George Palliser's gramophone, and then it was the voice of Elodie, and then some one, whom he knew to be himself, came and told him that he must go on, go on. He wanted quiet; why was it that they would not let him rest? If he hurried, he might get away soon from the noises, and lie down. He fancied that the yelling crowd outside the *cabaret* were upon him again like rabid dogs, and he staggered and stumbled, and knew that he must have cut his feet badly against a stone. Every one was merciless, except Elodie, and he could not find her in the dark; despair was in his heart, and he beat before him with his numbed hands. Grey dawn would be growing out of the night very soon, and he must go on, go on. The misery of it, the misery of another day and yet another day, and the nights when he walked in this heavy, dreadful dream.

He began to feel oddly anxious and distracted, and his indifference lessened. The night was so important; if he were only able to limp along like a dog with a broken leg he would be years getting out of Germany. He must spend as much strength as he had in traversing the miles at night. It seemed as though lights were dancing around him, and that the snow was luminous, and this amused one of his odd companions, for he laughed and laughed about it. He hated the sound, and he hurried again, getting himself up to the effort of a wretched dragging run, but anything was better than the laughter.

Oh, if one could only get away and hide away and sleep. Even a grave would be a better place, so that one could die; but death took such a hideously long

time. It might be days before the fierce vital fire of his life would sink down at last and give his body to the soft limitless rest of eternity. Through the gleams which came to him he saw Elodie's face quite clearly now, and he began to talk to her, and reason with her why it was that he had given in. "Oh, Love," he said, "let me lie down near you and sleep; it's so long since I've slept, Elodie—so long, so long; I don't think I can bear another day and another night; and now, you see, the snow has come, and I shall have to starve. Let me creep in somewhere away from it all and sleep." And then he came back to himself again, and the mirage vanished.

He was leaning against a fir tree, and the night had cleared, for he could see the stars overhead, burning very clearly in the frost, and all the forest was still and a light covering of white was everywhere. It was over him, also, and Kenny brushed it off and beat his arms against his sides. He knew that he had been through an ugly crisis, and that, as he grew weaker, it was probable that these dreams would recur to him. The track which he had followed wound a little to the left, and he saw that there was a wooden gate at the end, which cut it off from a wide drive bordered with trees. It certainly led to a house, and as Kenny leant on the gate, his teeth chattering with cold, he wondered whether he would dare to go onwards and look for a corner in the yard where he could sleep. At the beginning of his journey he would willingly have attempted the risk, but now he knew that he could not bluff any more.

"I couldn't bluff a chicken, much less a human being," he thought, but he crawled over the gate and went onwards.

He did not think that he had taken very long to climb the gate or that he had lessened his "hound's jog," as he called it, but certainly it began to snow again, and the darkness closed in on him. Those

myriads of white feathers were falling once more, and he breathed hard, for the effort became greater and greater. He had lost all sense of direction—even that had forsaken him now—and he was like a blind man, treading an unfamiliar road. He saw no way out, and he hardly tried to look for it. The whole air was full of whirling atoms, and again he said to himself that God had sent the snow, and so he was done, just done.

Of course it was kind in its way, because it was soft, and even if it meant to end up everything in this life, it did so gently. You couldn't fight out through the endless, moving curtain, because it followed you, and it never lifted; there was no such thing as escape. Even if there were, how could one escape with dragging legs and a body so numb that it could only just keep moving in ridiculously slow jerks forward, one difficult step at a time?

And he had once thought that he was going to get over the border, and get through to safety. He had dreamed that he would get back to Elodie, and be in London again, and walk down Regent Street. Regent Street? Perhaps it wasn't so far away after all. Sometimes one turned a corner and came back to everything one knew, because one had only been asleep and dreamed bad dreams. Fancy dreaming that you were lost in a snow-storm in a hostile country, where men hunted other men and laughed at their pain and agony? There was no such place. He had never heard of it before the war. . . . What was the war? He had thought quite a lot about it, once, and all it had been was a queer minute or two in a passage in some place, the name of which he totally forgot. He remembered that he had made trouble to get there at all, and once he was there, the narrow passage had been crowded, and now the air he breathed was so dense that it caught him with a definite pain.

He was completely lost, and there was little or

nothing to do but push on, because he had promised himself—was it?—that he would go on.

He knew that he had climbed a gate, and that soon after that he was wrapped about once more in whirling snow.

When he had been quite small, some one had given him a little crystal globe, and when you shook it a snow-storm took place inside, and a tiny figure in the centre was surrounded by the flying flakes of white. For some reason or other, God had decreed that he was to take the place of the wretched little creature, and live for ever amid the same bewildering phenomena. It had amused him once to shake the tiny globe, and now he knew what the poor victim enclosed within had felt. If only he might reach shelter. Even the trees had receded too far away to be sought as a refuge, and he could not go and hide beneath them, and lie on the soft mat of pine needles until he was covered deeply by the soft, white carpet.

What a mad night it was, and how the whirling fragments danced. Kenny felt a touch of excitement which died down quickly and ended in a dull sensation of pain.

He told himself to go on. That was what he was there to do. If he did not go on he must starve, and the crows would gather long before he was really dead and fly close to his face. The thought was hateful. Poor little Bland was so miserable; he had come and stared at him with wide, wild eyes, and Kenny had forgotten that he was dead; he hardly could tell who, among the crowd, was living, and who had passed on into another state which still left them free to walk the earth.

At last he sank down under a wall. He knew it must be a wall, because he put out his hands and felt something hard and resistant to his touch. Whatever his mind had to say about "going on," his body was mutinous. He had reached the end of his tether, and

he intended to stay and call some lingering comfort to his utter wretchedness at the last. The snow had drifted into a deep hollow, for, as he lay down, it was wonderfully restful, and, so that he could feel rested, nothing else really mattered very much to him now. He knew that he had parted with his last hope, and that he had nothing left. Fate had beggared him utterly, and he was bankrupt. Still, he was intensely alive, though he could only travel backwards and ever backwards. Even Elodie grew remote, and the little Kenny of such long forgotten years, who knew nothing about the cruelty and hardness of life, took the place of the man who had experienced so many other things. . . . That explained it all, he said to himself, and that was why his mother was near him again.

She had played with him for an hour or so in the evenings, just he and she together, in the big drawing-room at Castle Glenfield. He could see her sitting by the piano and playing to him while she sang. How was it that, for so long, he had never once recalled that picture of her? She was still quite young, and her voice, though it sounded very faint and far off, was sweet and musical. He wasn't cold, forlorn, and forgotten now; he was comforted, except for vague, transient pains, and he must be lying curled up on the sofa just near the big fire, only that he shivered now and again with a deathly chill. He knew every turn of her head, and how her rings had glittered as her hands danced over the keys. She had always worn a number of rings, and, among them, one with a ruby in the centre, which was like a drop of blood. Her hair was caught up by a band of velvet, and with a high comb, which an uncle of his had brought from Spain, and she smiled at him and drew her lips together in a dream-kiss. How young she looked, he thought, and he thought that it was wonderful to see her once more after so many years. She was far more beautiful than the portrait which hung in the dining-

room; and now she had come to meet him on his weary journey, and had brought an old known world about her to make a place for his tired soul to rest. Her hands were rippling along the keys of the piano. She had never been at all a great musician, but she could play the whole soul out of her little son.

It was a blessed thing to lie there, safe at last, and hear her play to him; and how long it had been since the days when she went away to the undiscovered country. . . . She was smiling at him as she sang:

*Oh, I'm going far away, far away from you, Jeanette—  
There's no one left to love me now, and you, too, may forget.*

Poor Jeanette! he had often felt all a child's incomprehensive pity for her and her sufferings. . . . The snow was growing deeper, and the fire must be dying down, for it was very dark again, and still the song continued:

*Oh, if I were King of France, or still better, Pope of Rome,  
I'd have no fighting men abroad, no weeping maids at home.  
All the world should be at peace, and if Kings must show their  
might,  
Then let those who make the quarrels be the only ones to fight.*

He could see how she bent her slender neck, and struck a ringing chord, before she repeated the last two lines. His wonderful mother, who had vanished in the dawn of things, and left him so little, except the memory of the twilight and her song.

Well, he was dying now, and that must be why she came back to him again, and why Elodie, who was alive, was distant. It would be ages before they could be reunited, but quite soon he would cross the tiny bridge of distance which kept him away from actual touch with the slender woman in the black silk dress, who sang in her light, soft voice. He was possessed by a fever of fear that he should lose her, and, as he moved, his wound began to give him agonies of pain

once more. He was drowned in a heavy sea of darkness, and then came back again to the icy world which existed only for his body, for his mind was now free to roam the world, and beyond the world. The piano still tinkled on, and the voice was singing, but he could no longer hear the words of the song. He raised himself a little, and caught at the hanging festoon of a creeper, and then he fell back again, and a dizzy numbness caught him and carried him away to some other planet.

Agas afterwards he returned, and he thought that fingers touched his face. The effort to open his eyes was stupendous, and when he did so, he saw the faint halo of light around a candle. The night must be very still, for the flame did not flicker at all, and he realized that some one was bending over him.

"I'm so tired," he said with an effort; "to-morrow I shall be better, but now I am so tired."

"Presently you shall sleep," said a voice which was strange to him, and he felt a pang of disappointment.

"Oh, mother," he said, "it isn't you—after so long as all this? I thought when I heard you singing. . . ." His voice, which was only just above a whisper, trailed into silence, and Kenny Gleeson dropped down fathomless abysses which opened to let him pass. He was still journeying on, but he had no direction now, for he had lost hold on every known landmark.



## CHAPTER XXXIII

THE Schloss Von Schwanenberg stood in a widely stretching park sheltered by fir trees. It was remote and grandly isolated, and in spite of war and devastation, only a short distance away, it held its charm of settled peace. Constructed of mellow red brick, and overgrown by heavy festoons of ivy and Virginia creeper, it gave a note of colour to the picture, for the trees were faithful in winter time. The original owner, the Baron Von Arthal, had migrated from Arnheim in Holland, having made a large fortune; he bought the tract of land known as Schwanenberg, and built the *Schloss* for himself and his descendants.

He had spared no expense in making his house beautiful, and the outlines of the high gables stood up amid the woods, with their effect of real beauty and distinction. Inside, the *Schloss* contained wonderful treasures of art; the big dining-hall was hung with large paintings, and the oak gallery which surrounded it was heavily carved, and dated from mediæval days; beyond the windows lay a rectangular courtyard with a sundial in the centre. There were long corridors, vast rooms, and a great sense of spaciousness and comfort, and the luxury was the luxury of selection and fine taste, for the first Baron had cared for nothing which was not intrinsically perfect.

But the Von Arthal family was to be other than quietly and steadily prosperous, for the son born to him by his German wife was a wild adventurer, and he drifted away and was never seen again in the Rhine country. It was as though some strange, inexplicable fluid had made its way into the blood of each Von

Arthal in turn, and as they came within the circle of modern years, though they still owned the *Schloss*, they never remained long in any one place. They were like swallows, and when Hermann Von Arthal died, his son, who succeeded him, had just married Céleste de Cherville, from Alsace. Céleste was one of the most beautiful girls in Europe, and she had cared for Rupprecht Von Arthal against the dictates of her own strong national feelings, for she had all the fire and fury of a latter-day Charlotte Corday, and she hated the conquerers of her own country.

Rupprecht, himself a blending of Flemish, Russian, and German, said that he was cosmopolitan, and his moustache, though brushed up, had none of the challenge of the true Prussian. Their married life had been a long series of wandering and travels, which took them far away from any points of discord, and Céleste, who had been born while the thunders of the Franco-Prussian War still echoed round the world, hardly realized what she herself felt. She knew that she loved Rupprecht, and that her son was like her. She taught him French, from the moment he began to speak, and she made him understand that, though nominally he was a German, his soul was part of the soul of her own adored land. Rupprecht died while Lairlie was still a little boy, and after her husband's death the *Baronin* Von Arthal returned to Schwanenberg.

With all its beauty, and all it had to offer, she hated the place and the people, and she lived there very much cut off from her wealthy neighbours. Her black hair and brilliant eyes and teeth, her tremendous dignity, and her fierce attacks upon the country of her adoption, made her feared, and she kept herself aloof. Lairlie had inherited much of her beauty; but Lairlie was of necessity a soldier in the great grey army of the Fatherland. He liked Berlin, and he was aware of his own standing in the Rhine province, and, though

he gave a deep and immense devotion to his mother, he had his own conception of what was his duty, though he spoke of it as seldom as possible when he returned to Schwanenberg.

The *Baronin* was no longer young, but her beauty had defied time, and she looked like an empress. She retained her figure and her vitality, and though she referred to herself as "old," she had really discounted time. Her son attributed it to the fact that the winters were long and dark, and that the sundial in the courtyard forgot half the year; and therefore his mother was able to continue young. With her immaculate teeth, and her thick hair which did not show one strand of white or grey, she was like a piece of statuary; and she was happy enough until the summer of 1914, when, for her as for so many others, happiness fell to pieces.

France was at war with Germany, and her whole soul was on the side of her own country; but her son was fighting for the cause of the Central Empires. She could have given him willingly for the liberty of France, but to know that he must fight on the side of her country's enemies was the bitterest knowledge which had yet come to her in all her life.

She had been unpopular before, with her German neighbours, for she had never disguised her feelings, and she lived a more utterly secluded life than ever. When Lairlie came back on leave she could hardly speak to him of the war; and though he did his best to bridge over the gap that had been torn, he feared that his mother and he would never look in each other's eyes with unity again.

As of old, she continued her rule over the servants of the house and the tenants on the property, and her own maid, Herminie, who was, like Lairlie, a child of mixed parentage, grew at times very anxious about her mistress.

The night when Kennedy, unknown to himself, had wandered into the park, and at last sunk down under the wall of the Schloss Von Schwanenberg, the *Baronin* had dined alone in the huge dining-hall, with all the state which she had never abated one jot. She knew well how to rule, and that to be a ruler you must exact the maximum of respect. Masses of heavy silver were set out on the table, and fine, shadowy glass, and though she ate almost nothing, she took her place in the high, carved chair, looking like a lonely queen, and permitting herself to be waited upon with her stern, unwavering dignity. She wore a black velvet dress, and filmy lace ruffles fell over her hands. When the meal was finished, her face grew more and more lined and saddened, and her dark eyes watched the shadows. She was surrounded by silence—a silence which deepened every day—and the sorrows which she suffered had marked their signature on her imperial beauty.

It was an evening just the same as every other evening, except that one of the servants had told her that snow had begun to fall. Snow was falling along the battle front, which was never out of her mind, and she longed with a kind of rage to hear the thunders of the French guns, and to see the armies of her own people marching to victory. They would conquer, of course they would conquer. She never doubted that for a moment; and Lairlie—she caught her breath—Lairlie, who was fighting for Germany, what would happen to him? Bone of her bone, flesh of her flesh, and yet owing his allegiance to the enemy.

She got up, with her imperious air, and swept through the doors, looking neither to the right nor to the left, and the servants closed them behind her. The boudoir where she usually sat, as the drawing-room was only used when Lairlie was home and she received

guests, was bright with a big fire, and the white fur rug was warm under her feet.

Why had she all this luxury and comfort, while her own people were driven forth and starved, or were dying in the trenches? She, who wanted nothing better than to see the Schloss Von Schwanenberg fall in ruins under a hail of French shells! All letters or knowledge of her own relatives had ceased altogether. She had five nephews and a grand-nephew fighting for France, that was a consolation, but her own son—her own son—her own son. . . .

The *Baronin* rang the bell and Herminie appeared. There was very little difference between them in age, but Herminie looked years older. She never dared to speak to her mistress, except on rare occasions when such a liberty was permitted, and she waited, in her close, white frilled cap and full black skirts, to receive orders.

"I shall probably sit up late," said the *Baronin*, with her air of utter fatigue. "Tell the servants to go to bed."

"*Bien, Madame*, but I shall wait for Madame?"

Céleste made a silent gesture of assent, and sat down in a gilt chair near the fire, shivering more from the tension of her own thoughts than because the room was cold.

France had once suffered defeat; she remembered so much which others had forgotten, and she had heard her own father and mother tell of the savage violence practised upon helpless innocent people. The English—what did they know? A stupid, gullible people, who, because their frontier was the sea, had no need for an army. Her face grew scornful, and she drew her lace shawl round her. Still, she did not dislike the English, and they had a way of holding on. Of course France would be victorious. Her strong face lighted a little; and then again she drew the sorrows of the years around her like a heavy cloak.

Loneliness was her companion, and whether her son survived or fell, she was isolated from him. The deep fundamental love of her own country, which remained one of her strongest feelings, had doubled in its power, now that France was in danger, and the simple grandeur of her own countrymen was at its zenith in the time of trial. The ordeal was terrific, and she, shut in in the German country, suffered with them while she could do nothing. She, who had not known the blessedness of being able to give succour to any of them.

The *Baronin* stirred in her chair and lifted her head. She could hear the crisp, dry patter of snowflakes against the window, and the night wind had died down. Her country was holding on high the great burning torch of chivalry, was redeeming the stricken world. The men who were gasping out their souls in the winter night were as sacrificial victims, "giving their lives as a ransom for many." Her face grew young again as she pondered over her own thoughts. Out in the awful, discouraging winter of the night the French armies were carrying on their tremendous duty with a steadfast heart; out there in the unimaginable tumult of peril and agony, and the waves of war were strewing the whole earth with wreckage. A touch of exaltation came upon her, and she walked to the piano and opened it. Sometimes, when she felt very lonely, she sang to herself, and she sat down and played for a little, and her voice, which was still wonderfully clear and full, floated out into the room. She had not been thinking of England, except vaguely, and it was more as a challenge to the country where she had lived that she broke into a tinkling English air, that belonged to the Victorian days, and had been written about the war that had devastated France when she herself was a girl.

In the middle of her singing she broke off, and again she listened to the drifting fall of snow. It must be

piling up over the flower-beds under the windows of the *Schloss*, and turning them into the similitude of graves. Her former youth and passion arose and stirred in her blood, and, without knowing why she did so, except that the warmth and light of the boudoir made her restless, she unlatched the window and stood by it, feeling the keen air on her face.

She brushed the sill clear of snow and leaned out. What matter if the white flakes fell on her head and shoulders? There were men in their extremity lying under the same chill wrapping, and she had everything which they lacked. Oh, to be one with her own race again. She had no other longing in her heart, and the thought of her son, now actually in the town of Cambrai with his General, living perhaps as an usurper in the house of one of her own old friends, burned like fire. Was he hers, or was he only the child of his father and his country? How were these questions decided?

The sill was cold under her arms, but she did not heed it, and she pictured the whole long range of the fighting front, and the desecration of her own soil under the steady advance of the Prussian hosts. God would not permit them to conquer; surely, surely, something would come which would drive them back.

Suddenly she heard a faint sound, and below her, against the white background of the snow, she saw something move. A man got up and held on by the creeper which covered the wall at the towered corner of the house. He stood in the shaft of yellow light that streamed through the darkness from the open window, and then, holding out his arms, he fell forward. The *Baronin* wondered if she was dreaming, and whether she had actually called up the presentment of a man, dying for France. She pressed her hands tightly over her heart and leaned out again. It was not a dream, for she could distinguish the

outline of a form huddled in a heap, and a wild notion crossed her mind. Perhaps all her longings had woven themselves into a prayer, and this was a wandering Frenchman, strayed and lost, yet directed, through some wonderful agency, to her own door.

The house was quiet, and the servants had retired to the west wing where they slept, only Herminie was awake and watchful, drowsing a little by the fire in her own room up the wide staircase. The *Baronin* drew back into the room, her face very pale, and her eyes alight with thought, and she took a fur cloak from a chair. It was left there for her to wrap around her shoulders as she walked along the passages to her bedroom, and she put it on, covering the grey pearls which she wore round her neck, and wrapped the soft folds of the sable round her arms and throat. She had begun to think steadily, and she saw that it was quite probable that the man who lay at her door might be a bad character from the mines or wharves of Duisburg, and that she should call the servants to his assistance, but this thought did not hold her attention long.

The keys of the house were placed on a tray near her chair; every night she brought them with her to her room and handed them over to Herminie. She went forward and took up the heavy bunch, holding it reflectively between her hands. Just where the man had fallen there was a side door, which opened from the passage that led from the boudoir on to the uninhabited portion of the house; and she could, if he proved to be a wanderer from some prison camp, or a strayed soldier who had been put to work near the line, bring him in there without causing any commotion in the *Schloss*.

She opened the door of the boudoir, and went along the passage, still undecided as to what she would do, but determined at least to see for herself what manner of man her unexpected guest might be; and with this



idea foremost in her mind she unfastened the door and opened it.

Outside, the sky was clear, and the stars blazed down frostily over a thick pall of snow. Everything was intensely still, except for the tiny cracking and rustling of the frost, and the *Baronin* shivered slightly. Her thin satin shoes were no protection against the icy cold of the path, and she turned to where the lights still poured out through the open window, and lay in a huge yellow patch in the surrounding darkness.

In the centre of the circle a man was lying, his face hidden on his arms, and for a moment she thought he was dead. Her skirts were wet with the deep snow as she went onwards, for it had drifted under the walls, and, as she bent down and touched him, she recoiled quickly. He was in rags, and his arms were bare and frightfully thin. From his clothing she judged that he must be a tramp, and she saw that his feet were bound with strips of torn clothes. Whoever he was his need was urgent, and the *Baronin* bent again, and raised his head on her arms.

In the light of the open window she saw his face, and he opened his eyes and smiled. Even with his dense growth of shaggy hair, and in his helpless condition of disarray and neglect, Kennedy Gleeson carried the dim suggestion of being other than he looked, and the *Baronin* stared at him again. He was not a Frenchman, certainly, but equally certainly he was not a German, for he spoke some incoherent words to her in English, and like a flash of light the explanation made its way in upon her.

The warmth of her own body had revived him, and he made an effort to raise himself; and putting her arms under his, the *Baronin* struggled to give him strength enough to rise to his feet.

For a moment Kennedy leaned against the wall, and then he said, speaking quite reasonably, that he must go on, because he was losing time.

"Come with me," said the *Baronin*, in a low, quiet voice; "it is not very far, *Monsieur*."

Obedient to her words he took her outheld hands, and she led him up the low flight of steps and locked the door behind him. Kennedy stood like a man in a trance, waiting for her to tell him what he was to do. Again she spoke in the same low, emphatic voice, and she brought him into the boudoir, where the warmth came like a benediction to his frozen body.

There was a cup of warm milk on a stand close to the fire and without speaking again the *Baronin* drew up a chair for him, and he drank the hot liquid eagerly.

She was watching him with steady eyes, and thinking the problem over in careful detail.

Her husband had two nephews who had not been to the *Schloss* since their early boyhood, and if she could persuade the servants that one of them had arrived unexpectedly it would be far easier to nurse her guest through the long illness which she felt sure must menace him, than to hide him in the unoccupied quarter of the house. Lairlie had left quantities of uniform in his own room upstairs, and this unknown man and Lairlie were very much the same size and build. If he could get into an old suit of uniform, and manage to pull a worn pair of high boots over his blistered feet the effect she desired could be arrived at. She was desperately anxious, and she bent over him again.

"Are you able to understand what I say?" she asked.

Kennedy collected himself, and tried to stand up.

"I am so grateful," he said, speaking with difficulty, and caught by a heavy attack of shivering, "but I ought not to stay." He addressed her in German. "I have no right to involve you in my troubles, *Gnädige*." He staggered a little and then sat down again.

He had answered the most pressing of her questions, for she realized that he spoke German well enough to

carry out part of her plan, and she put her hand on his arm.

"You are in great danger," she said, "but if you are able to do as I tell you, you will be safe. You understand me?"

Kennedy looked at her, and wondered dimly at her beauty and grace, and told her that, though his body felt dead, his brain was perfectly clear.

"I shall go now and call my maid. She is to be trusted, but none of the others—you understand me, none of the others. When I come back I will bring you a whole change of clothing, and you must be made to look as though you had only suffered considerably, but no more than that. There is no very great hurry, so don't be distressed."

"My hands are so numb," Kennedy said, breathing hard, "I don't think I could shave myself, but I could get into other clothes." He bent close to the fire. "I will do my best, only I feel that it is bringing you into danger."

"I care nothing for that," said the *Baronin*. "Again, *Monsieur*, will you pay great attention to what I say? You will? When you are dressed, and have had a cordial which will revive you very much, you must go out by the side door, where I let you in, and, following the path round the house, walk up the steps and ring the bell. You will be admitted by my maid"—she bent over him again—"and I wish you to say that you are my nephew, Richter Von Arthal."

Kennedy, who was feeling the agonies of renewed circulation, battled with the pain and replied that he could remember.

"Once you are in the hall the servants will be summoned, and after that the rest is easy. You must say that your horse threw you, miles back along the road, and that, because of the snow, you wandered lost, and dreadfully shaken. All this you will tell me

when I come down the staircase and recognize you as my nephew."

Kennedy repeated her words like a child learning a lesson, and he clung to each point of the directions she gave.

"After that, think of nothing further," said the *Baronin*, "and now I must leave you."

She wrapped her fur cloak round him, and, taking a backward look from the door, went out into the passage and up the staircase, through the sleeping house to her own room, where Herminie was nodding by the fire.

"Herminie," she said, taking her by the shoulders, "wake up at once, there are many things to do, and they must be done without delay. An English officer is in the house, and we must save him."

Herminie sprang to her feet, and then fell on her knees and clutched at the skirts of the *Baronin's* dress.

"*Mon Dieu, Madame*, for the love of God, do nothing so rash. You know that the Germans will shoot you if they find him. There may be a party searching for him even now. Oh, *Madame, Madame*, I beg you to send him away."

The *Baronin* drew herself up and looked scornfully at Herminie. "The German blood in you is speaking," she said with a gesture of disdain. "You would ask me to turn a fugitive from my door, one of those who have fought for France."

Herminie got to her feet, and bowed her head humbly.

"It is as *Madame* wills," she replied.

Holding her by the arm with no light grasp, the *Baronin* outlined the story which she had already told to Kennedy, and they went together to the room where Lairlie slept when he was at home, and collected the necessary clothes.

"Are you of any use?" said the *Baronin* im-

patiently? "For example, Herminie, could you shave a man?"

Herminie raised her scared face, and said that she could, but not very admirably.

"Then bring my son's dressing-case," said the *Baronin*, herself loaded with clothing; "and have you chosen the old boots that we thought to give away?"

Pushing Herminie before her, she closed the door, and they went downstairs to the boudoir, where Kennedy was standing, rubbing his arms and legs, and trying to recover his vitality.

He saw his own reflection, and looked at himself with a strong desire to laugh. His hair was a wild, black bush, and his beard entirely hid all the lower part of his face. His jersey was in tatters over his naked flesh, his trousers caked with mud and drenched with snow; on his feet he had nothing but the rags of his shirt—over all this he wore the satin-lined sables of the *Baronin*. He felt dreadfully tired, but he was fully conscious, and his mind seemed doubly alert; and as the *Baronin* poured him a glass of cognac from a decanter, he knew that he had regained sufficient force to undertake the strange adventure still ahead of him before he could rest. Rest beckoned to him with alluring fingers, and he ached so persistently in every limb.

Laying a sheet on the floor, Herminie undertook her task, and clipped with agitated fingers. It was all ridiculous in its way, and yet all three of them were under the shadow of death, and together the two women worked heroically, helped by Kennedy himself, so far as it was possible.

At last the awful toilet was complete, and Kennedy saw, instead of the wild-looking vagabond, a gaunt young man with hollows round his eyes, and a starved face, dressed in the service uniform of the German army, and wrapped in a long cloak. His feet were tortured by the weight of the boots, and the soft

socks beneath did very little to alleviate the pain, but he was so used to pain and endurance that he knew he could bear this last demand upon him.

"*Madame*," he said, holding his cap in his hand, "I beg of you once more to consider the position in which your great kindness places you. I beg of you to think again before you make it irrevocable."

The *Baronin* shook her head.

"You would deprive me of the answer to many prayers," she said; "also, *Monsieur*, you are ill. Tomorrow you will need much care and attention, and I alone shall give it to you."

She took him back by the way he had come, and opened the door into the night. Snow was falling again, and it was well, she said, for all traces of foot-prints would be covered over before morning.

"You go round the house, and come up the steps," she said, "and after a little you will be admitted."

Kennedy plunged into the snow, and the door shut behind him. His legs were very weak, but he had only a little way now to travel, and rest still beckoned him onwards. All he had to do now was to get himself up the steps of the entrance and ring again and again.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

THE *Baronin*, assisted by Herminie, cleared the *débris* from the room, and left it, looking as it always did when she herself retired for the night.

From time to time Lairlie had arrived at unusual hours, and there was nothing very remarkable in the fact that a nephew, whose name was well known to the household, should make his appearance at the doors after midnight.

The *Baronin* went to her room and began to take the jewels from her neck and ears, and Herminie flitted about in the shadows behind her, a prey to agonies of suspense and fear. The time seemed endless, and Kennedy had said he would take long enough to give them sufficient time to bring everything back to its usual effect again, and at last even the *Baronin* grew nervous, in case he had fallen in the snow. If he were to lie there till morning, the icy winter of the night would kill the last flare of his vitality.

Suddenly the bell rang out, clanging through the echoing silence of the house, and Herminie clasped her hands and prayed.

The *Baronin* turned and spoke to her.

"Go down at once," she said imperiously; "if it were my nephew who was at the door you would not trouble the *Bon Dieu* with that ridiculous noise. Control yourself, Herminie, and do as I told you."

Herminie went out of the room and ran down the polished corridor, her felt-clad feet making no sound. She crossed the hall, turning on all the lights as she

went, in faithful obedience to the *Baronin's* commands.

The outer door was barred with heavy bolts, and when she had turned the key, she pulled and dragged with trembling hands, and at last threw wide the doors.

A torrent of whirling snow swept in, nearly blinding her, and then Kennedy Gleeson staggered across the threshold. The time he had spent outside had used up the remaining little store of his vitality, and he got to a chair and sat down; his strength was ebbing like life-blood, and he knew that he was done.

Herminie shrieked at last. She had been longing to shriek ever since the *Baronin* came and took her by the shoulders as she dozed by the fire, dreaming of the lost yesterdays of peace and happiness, and now she shrieked unreprieved. She caught the hanging pull of the bell which was to alarm the servants of a midnight arrival, and the sound could be heard echoing and echoing through the extent of the house. In a few moments they came flying in response to the summons, and as they crossed into the hall, they found Herminie leaning over the exhausted figure of a young officer in Prussian uniform.

"*Mein Gott*, what has happened?" asked the old valet, Johann Klops, who had lived all his life under the roof of the *Schloss*; "it is not the master?"

"*Nein, nein*, it is a stranger," said Herminie; "call the *Baronin*. He is ill and cannot speak."

"Who is this?" the voice of the *Baronin* came from the head of the wide staircase, and she stood there, wrapped in a thick white cloak, and with all her serene effect of rulership more marked than usual. Then she hastened a little and spoke her son's name.

"It is not the *Herr, Gnädige*," explained Johann, "but it is an officer of his regiment. Perhaps he is wounded. *Gott in Himmel*, I pray there is no disaster to the army."



The *Baronin* came towards Kennedy, who struggled to greet her, and she turned and spoke rapidly to the servants.

"It is the *Herr* Richter Von Arthal," she said; "prepare the west room at once, and I myself will see that he is attended to."

Kennedy smiled faintly. He could do nothing to help her, and he wondered sadly if the clothes he wore were marked with a name other than that of the man he personated. Every risk was tremendous now, both for himself and for the generous *Baronin*, and he made a fresh effort.

"I can get to bed," he said, and he pushed the well-meaning Johann aside. "My apologies to you, *mein Gnädige*; it is a ridiculous hour to arrive, but in war one forgets."

He told himself that he must not break down now, but the lights grew dim, and it took a great effort on his part to get up the endless staircase.

The whole household was in a state of commotion, and he could hear them wondering what had happened. They were all frightened in case the French had stormed through the line.

"All is well," he said, speaking with difficulty, "there is no disaster to the troops of the Fatherland; I was thrown from my horse near Orsoy."

Would they never go away and leave him in peace? He must get to bed, or the slipping, sliding waves of darkness would engulf him. And he wasn't sure about his clothes. Such a wretched little thing to trouble a man at such an hour.

Herminie brought him a hot drink as he sat on the side of the large bed, which had been made ready for his reception, and already a fire burned in the grate.

"Herminie, if you love me, tell me if my shirt is marked with a name that gives me away?" he asked in a low voice.

For the first time since he had seen her, her face broke into a broad smile.

"Von Arthal," she replied, "that is all. It is quite safe."

And then, without any kind of excuse or apology, Kennedy fainted.

He knew that he lay there for days and nights, and nights and days, that Herminie and the *Baronin* nursed him, and that a doctor came and told the *Baronin*, for this filtered through his long, weary dreams, that he would recover, but that the case surprised him, for certainly the *Herr Leutnant* was starved.

"It is wonderful," he said, "what they bear for us, these dear sons of our great country. He must have fought for days without food, and once been sorely wounded, and been by no means well attended to, for there is the mark of a scar on his shoulder. *Lieber Gott*, he is a fine young man, *Gnädige*, and he will recover, and again go out to war."

As he grew better Johann took turns at his bedside, and talked a great deal of Lairlie, and whispered to Kennedy that the *Baronin* was French at heart. "*Tausend Teufel*, she was French, and it was well to be careful what one said."

Lairlie Von Arthal, so Kennedy gathered from Johann, who had taken charge of him when he was a little boy, was the light of his eyes. He expected Kennedy to know all about his cousin, but Johann was simple and easily lured away from one subject to another, to explain that the *Baronin* was terribly proud, and all the servants went in awe of her; they did not appear to resent her attitude, and indeed they took very little interest in anything outside their own narrow lives; but for them all Lairlie represented romance.

When he arrived on his rare visits he brought a sense of youth with him, and Johann likened his com-

ing to the airs of spring; he had a violent temper, which they also admired in him, and was free enough with his cutting-whip in the stable quarters if he thought that the horses did not look their best, and he had an eye for a pretty girl, and Kennedy concluded that Lairlie was a past master in the art of pinches and kisses.

"So long as he doesn't turn up while I am here," was his own eternal comment, for the very thought of a return to the old, hunted misery of his life was a black shadow to him, and he was still too weak to think of going away. Whenever he did think of it and of how he was to get through to England, his imagination failed, and there was nothing left to do but to wait for strength.

The first day he was able to leave his room and come downstairs was a great event, and Johann helped him along as though he were an overgrown baby. Johann had become very nearly as devoted to Kennedy as he was to Lairlie, and thought the *Herr* Richter quite on a level with his own master.

The boudoir was gay with flowers from the long conservatory, and Kenny sat on the sofa, where he had lain in a drenched mass on the night of his arrival. Opposite to him the *Baronin* sat, and gave him one of her rare, brilliant smiles.

"Now that you are better," she said, "there remains the question of your going on through Holland. I foresee no difficulty, and from here you will be able to travel in a carriage to Emmerich. My late husband's lawyer does business there, and he can arrange to bring you with him to Arnheim. After that there will be no difficulty at all."

"I wish I could thank you," said Kennedy in a low voice, looking down at his smart uniform, the colour of a dove's wing, for he had been provided with another suit of Lairlie's wonderful regimentals, and, though he was still very pale, his old gay look

had returned, and his brown hair, with its gold, wing-like effect, was brushed back smooth from his forehead. His blue eyes were very earnest, and the *Baronin* smiled again, for she liked him.

"You have taken such ghastly risks for me," he went on. "It's strange, isn't it, how one is obliged to drag the very people one would give most to protect or thank into danger."

"No one has guessed," she said; "it was an inspiration. I am sure that whatever will it was which guided you here was also working in my heart that night."

"I think I ought to leave as soon as possible," Kenny went on; "every day increases the risk, and I am well enough now to travel. Why, there will be simply no hardships at all if I get to Emmerich, and on, without having to walk." His mouth contracted a little at the memory the words conjured up in his mind.

"The name of my lawyer is *Mijnheer* Van De Velde; he has a house in the Vyzel Straat in Arnheim. He is a good man, *Monsieur*, and you may tell him the truth. You know the proverb of the burghers of Guelderland?"

Kenny shook his head.

"I know no proverbs," he said, "except that a stitch in time saves nine, and I remembered that when I had no needles and thread, *Madame*, so the wisdom was wasted upon me."

"Then I will tell you," said the *Baronin*. "'Great in courage, poor in goods, sword in hand;' such is the motto of the Guelderland."

"Do you think I may start to-morrow?" asked Kennedy, getting up and walking round the room. "I am very strong, and I cannot bear to stay here one unnecessary hour, even though it has been heaven." He came over to where she stood, and taking her hand, raised it to his lips.

One could only offer that sort of tribute to a great lady like the *Baronin*, and she understood it.

"You will return and fight?" she said suddenly, her eyes looking into those of Kennedy; "you will fight for my country?"

"The sooner I get back, *Madame*, the sooner I shall be out in France again," he said, and he sat down, fiddling a little restlessly with the gold of Lairlie's belt.

"You see, it is like this," he said, "I must get back home to tell a girl whom I care very much for that I love her. After one has done that it isn't so difficult; but I want to marry her, *Madame*, I want that out of life very badly."

"She is of your own nationality?" asked the *Baronin*.

"No, not exactly. I am Irish and she is Welsh."

The *Baronin* turned her eyes to the window.

"Will she ever come to feel that her son is not her son because of that?" she said. "If she ever will, it would be better for her to be dead."

Kennedy lowered his eyes and said nothing for a moment.

"God knows what the future holds," he said slowly, "but I don't think that trouble will fall upon us."

He sat with her until late, and, after that day, he was able to come down to dinner in the big dining-hall of the *Schloss*, for his recovery was rapid, and his strength came back quickly. As he contrasted his surroundings with what he had been through it all seemed more than ever strange. He had come into Germany in a cattle-truck, surrounded by dead and dying, and his varying fortunes had carried him through horrors and trials undreamed of, and now he was sitting at the table of a man who was on the Staff of a German General, and being waited upon by servants who believed him to belong to the household. His clothes—those wonderfully magnificent clothes—

which he wore, and which, in all truth, became Kennedy remarkably well, were part of the phantasy, and his own poor, discarded garments, which had hung on him in rags, had been burnt by Herminie, for burnt rags tell no tales.

And always, away over there in England, people were living normal lives, interrupted now and then by air-raids, but otherwise perfectly calm; and in Room 24 Palliser was keeping them cheery, and the old gramophone was grinding out its harsh, discordant tunes. How many lives, all so distinctly separated, and all of them going on, still going on.

Only a little time, now, separated him from the great reunion with everything he wanted in life, and the intense happiness of return. "Only those who lose can find," some one had said, and Kennedy reflected, as the *Baronin* talked to him, that he had lost nothing really except for having mislaid hope for a time, when he wandered starving through the woods.

"Can I go on to-morrow?" he said, when the servants had withdrawn, and he and the *Baronin* were alone at the table, with its glory of polished silver and glass. "I am only getting nervy again, *Madame*, amid all this comfort."

The *Baronin* tapped her long fingers on the arms of her chair.

"If the day is fine," she said at last, "I will send you with Johann to Emmerich. At present *Mijnheer* Van De Velde is staying there, at the *Rheinischer Hof*. It is only an hour's drive, and I could even go with you; I should like to see you into safety."

"*Madame*," Kennedy said impulsively, "it is like a dream to me. One goes through much, you understand, and to be safe—I hardly dare even yet to say so audacious a word."

She leaned forward and put her hand on his arm.

"I helped you because, at first, I hoped that you were French, and that I was aiding one of my own

countrymen, and then I came to be glad, just because it was you. *Monsieur*, I felicitate the lady whom you are to marry, and it is I who shall have given her the best present of all."

"I said I was a bad halfpenny, and that the bad halfpennies always turned up again," he said with a laugh; "after all, *Madame*, life is a wonderful game for a gambler. There are so many sides to it, so many chances, if one has the wit to take them when and as they come."

The *Baronin* bent forward again and touched his face with her slim fingers, and, as she did so, the door opened, and they both turned quickly. Unannounced and unexpected, Lairlie Von Arthal came in and stood for a second, looking with amused astonishment at the sight which met his gaze.

## CHAPTER XXXV

**L**AIRLIE VON ARTHAL was a tall, slightly-built young man, with a face that betrayed the fact that he was something of a *viveur*, and that his ways, though gay and headlong, were not altogether righteous and correct. He had the stamp of his mother's pride about him, and he looked like her, except that their natures had signed themselves very differently in their eyes and the expression of their personalities. Lairlie used his good looks deliberately, and had something of the dash and mystery of a *Königsmark* in his manner, and, as he stood in the open doorway, mud-splashed and flushed with wind and weather, he brought a burst of new influences into the room. The *Baronin* rose at once and held out her hands. She was admirably composed, and she kissed him with her cold air of distance and indifference, and then he turned and looked at Kennedy again, and his surprise became greater. Kennedy looked back at him, and said nothing. The unforeseen had come once again, and he wondered what he ought to do. How could he possibly lift the responsibility from the magnificent shoulders of the *Baronin*? If he were to give himself up it might be best, but he waited, standing by his chair.

"Shut the door, my son," said the *Baronin*, "and oblige me by not calling the servants at present."

Lairlie walked to the door and closed it, and came back to the table, still watching Kennedy closely.

"This," said the *Baronin*, putting out her hand towards Kennedy, "is my guest."

Lairlie bowed formally.



"So I suppose," he said with a laugh; "mine also, in that case. I wish you good-evening, *Herr Lieutenant*."

Kennedy felt as though his own sense of things must be growing dim, and he searched vainly in his mind for a reply.

"I have to thank you for my clothes," he said, suddenly; after all, what was the use of standing like a dumb animal? Von Arthal was a man of his own age, and the issues were between them alone. "I am, in short, *Herr* Von Arthal, a British officer, escaped some months ago from the *Husaren Kasernen* at Crefeld, and I am now, certainly, your prisoner."

The *Baronin* flung out her hands.

"Lairlie," she said, "he is our guest; he is here in great peril, and if you betray him——"

Lairlie threw off his cloak, and flung it over a chair.

"Mother," he replied, interrupting her, "I think you had better leave Lieutenant——?" he turned to Kenny.

"Kennedy Gleeson," said Kenny. "I was taken at Belle Court in an ambush, during the early months of the war."

"Well, I think that Lieutenant Gleeson and I had better discuss this matter alone."

The *Baronin* stood her ground.

"If you hand him over to the authorities, I shall go to the Magistrate and inform him that I assisted an enemy of Germany to escape," she said. "You know that I shall not hesitate to take this course if you force it upon me. As for the penalty, I care nothing for it."

Von Arthal walked to the door and held it open.

"We shall discuss this later," he said, and with so much gentleness that Kennedy felt a quick sense of admiration for him. After all, if one had to be taken, it was something to be taken by "a decent sort of bloke," as Palliser would say.

The *Baronin* came and touched him again with her

hands, her eyes were heavy with tears, and her firm mouth trembled a little.

"*Au revoir*," she said, and then she turned and walked away, casting one strange, searching look at the face of her son.

Von Arthal closed the door behind her and came back into the room, standing close to Kennedy.

"And now," he asked, "what is your story?"

He sat down as he spoke, and motioned Kennedy to the chair opposite. Kennedy and the *Baronin* had dined at a smaller table near the fire, and not at the great dining-table itself, so that the two men were close enough, and their eyes held each other steadily.

"I have not much to add to what I have already said," Kennedy spoke quietly. "I escaped through Duisburg, and, after that, I wandered for a long time in the fields and woods. One night I lost myself in a snow-storm, and I got here without knowing how I came. The *Baronin* helped me, and there was no suspicion aroused, because, in the house, they believe me to be Richter Von Arthal. I think she is quite safe really, if you yourself are prepared to take me away as a friend. Once we are clear of here you can report me as having been found in the park——" His voice sounded a little weary, for Kennedy had suffered through all the renewed realization that life was ended once again. "By God, if you don't object, I'd far rather you shot me," he said; "it's having to go back, after so much, that hits one hard."

Lairlie filled his glass and pushed the decanter to Kennedy.

"Take a drink," he said in English. "We are both soldiers, and you are in for hard luck."

Kennedy helped himself, and stared at his glass.

"It's going back that is so damnable," he said again.

Lairlie lighted a cigarette and held out his case to Kennedy. "I got that case from a British officer," he said inconsequently, "a fellow I had known well; we

had been friends before the war. He, like you, was taken, and he gave me this. I value it very much indeed. You asked me just now if I would shoot you. I am a soldier, Lieutenant Gleeson, not a murderer."

Kennedy took a cigarette and lighted it, watching the smoke thoughtfully.

"Everything gets changed in war," he said; "if you had been a prisoner I don't think you would resent what I asked of you."

"Ah, a prisoner," echoed Lairlie; "yes, that is different."

"It means what no free man can guess at, what no free man ever dreamed of," went on Kennedy. "It goes deeper than any words; it eats into your soul, until you begin to be afraid of yourself. One keeps up the pretence, and the best men do their best, but it is only a subterfuge, a curtain that you hang up so that you won't see the truth and go mad. It takes the grit out of you, and it lessens you bit by bit—bit by bit," he crumbled a fragment of bread between his fingers, "and, at the end, I can't think what sort of men we shall be whenever peace comes and we do get back."

Lairlie moved his position in his chair and looked at Kennedy again.

"For an officer of the German army to help an escaped prisoner is impossible," he said; "you know that without my telling you."

"Of course I know it. I knew when you came in at the door, *Herr* Von Arthal, every chance I had was ended. That was why I said nothing at first. It's rather a shattering blow."

"I must bring you, as you suggest, a considerable distance from here," said Von Arthal; "all that is easy; the real trouble lies along other lines."

Kennedy hardly understood him, and he said nothing.

"I don't *want* to send you back," Von Arthal

smiled, and made an entirely French gesture with his hand. "I am really a kindly sort of person, and I hate a big responsibility. In this case I am really dealing with my mother. My mother, as you probably know already, is a woman of very strong character."

"She is wonderful," Kennedy said, and leaned his elbows on the table.

The picture of the two men was curiously vivid as they sat facing one another. They were both young, both very remarkably good-looking. Lairlie wore his war-stained uniform, and Kennedy was dressed in the grey of State occasions, with its picturesque effect, and, as they looked at each other, strange feelings came to both of them. Kennedy's face had suffered a change under the stress of the time he had endured, but his eyes were still the same, and, though he was desperately hard hit, he met his fate bravely. Only now had he perceived fully the greatness of his liberty. The horror and unreason of the situation forced itself upon Lairlie, and he looked again at Kennedy Gleeson.

"We are a house divided against itself," he went on, "and whereas I am a German subject, and perfectly ready to take my share in my country's war, my mother remains irreconcilably French. If I deliver you up to justice she will assuredly give herself over to the authorities, once she has said that she intends to do so. If you imagine that my mother ever speaks without meaning all she says, you do not know her."

Kennedy sat back again in his chair.

"You must manage, then, so that she thinks you are helping me to get away," he said quietly. "There is no alternative. Listen, Von Arthal, I will give you my word of honour not to attempt to escape, and, when you leave here in the morning, or whenever it is, I will go with you. As I told you, I am supposed to be your cousin, and I am now well enough to

travel. So far as keeping up the pretence is concerned, all that is easy enough. I think that ought to do?"

Von Arthal looked down at his plate.

"It sounds all right," he agreed, and still he did not look up.

"Did you have a peculiarly hellish time of it?" he asked.

"I suppose it was no worse for me than the rest," said Kennedy, "but I can't say that it was pleasant."

"Hasn't it struck you," the young Prussian spoke again, with a touch of sudden feeling, "that when one fights at a distance it is all right? everything is forgotten then in the fury of the desire to conquer, but, once you get right away from that—sitting as we are now—one thinks of so many other things. You and I both want to live, and we can't hate one another deeply; why should we? Yet it falls to me to make you return to a condition which means despair."

"It is war," Kennedy said sorrowfully.

"Suppose," went on Von Arthal, "that I hand you over my revolver and I stand here, unarmed; would you shoot me and get out?"

Kennedy shook his head.

"No, I should not," he replied. "You said to me just now that you were a soldier, not an assassin. I am no different to you."

"For the sake of my mother, you are prepared to make it all easy?"

"I told you what I intended to do," Kennedy spoke rapidly. "I have given you my *parole*, only, for God's sake, man, don't keep me hanging about here longer than you need. I'd rather get it all over, now it has to be."

"If she has the smallest suspicion, she will never go back on what she said," Von Arthal said in a low voice. "I admire her more than any one in the world, Lieutenant Gleeson. I have my beliefs, and all that sort of thing, but she has passion and principle which

nothing alters. The war has changed her dreadfully, and, between us, there is a gap now that I cannot bridge across."

"She will be in no danger," Kennedy said, speaking emphatically. "I pledge myself to let nothing I may feel appear. One gets good at playing a part when you have been a fugitive. And remember how much I owe to her."

"Then, when we join her presently, will you tell her that you are coming with me in the morning, and that I am taking you—by the way, what was the plan?"

"I was to meet her lawyer in Emmerich, and she believed that he could get me into Holland. He goes back to Arnheim either to-morrow or the next day."

In spite of himself, and because he was still very weak, Kennedy felt the awful woe of his loss sweep over him, and he shaded his face with his hands.

Von Arthal was silent again for some time.

"It would break her heart if she were to find out that she had been betrayed," he said slowly. "There is not very much danger of that, because she would hardly expect to hear anything from you, but she will be certain to write to Van De Velde. You see, in that case, that I shall have to say that I undertake the arrangement for your escape." He got up and began to pace the floor. "I must be careful, Lieutenant Gleeson; it means a great deal. Even my own standing in the army and the influence of relations would not save her. If it did, she would still be broken——" He stopped and looked again at Kennedy, and suddenly he burst out into words. "I hate to think of men caged up behind walls. I hate to think of them."

"It is all part of war," said Kennedy again.

"Have you any idea," went on Von Arthal, "what it is to be of a mixed race, and find that, at times, all the impulse of one's nature goes against one's loyalty? If things had been the other way, and my mother a

German and my father French, I should be across the line now. The frontier is clear enough on a map, but when you get into the tangles of men's minds and feelings, how do you find it?"

Kennedy looked at him, and again he was struck by the likeness to his mother.

"Once one is a prisoner," he said, "the world grows very small, and there are no such questions to answer," he gave a short laugh; "one is enveloped in a queer and rather unsatisfactory little eternity of one's own."

"Suppose I throw open the door and tell you that I shall not see or hear anything if you choose to escape?" Von Arthal said, returning to the table and leaning on his hands. "I do not wish to add to the tortures of any man's soul."

Kennedy shook his head.

"You have forgotten one thing," he said; "I have given you my *parole*."

Von Arthal drew himself up and turned away.

"Let us go into the drawing-room," he said; "we have still that to do, Lieutenant Gleeson."

They walked through the hall together, and Lairlie Von Arthal greeted the servants, who assembled there, full of delight at his return. He spoke to them in his easy, laughing way, and he and Kennedy talked for a little to Johann, who was proud of the wonderful recovery that the *Herr Leutnant* Richter had made.

"*Ach, mein Herr*," he said, "the *Herr Leutnant* will fight again for our homes, but we who are left will be sad when he is gone."

"He is coming away with me in the morning, Johann," said Lairlie, "but he will not fight again, not for many months."

"No, I shall not fight for a very long time," agreed Kennedy, with a grim line around his mouth.

"That is good," said old Johann, rubbing his hands delightedly, and they passed on into the great *salon*,

which was lighted by three huge chandeliers, and, by the fire, the *Baronin* sat like a woman carved in stone.

Lairlie closed the door, and the two young men came across the floor together, Von Arthal holding Kennedy by the arm.

"I am leaving you in the morning, *Madame*," said Kennedy, standing by her chair and looking down into her lifted eyes, which were dull and hard. "Your son is to take me to the frontier. Yes, he is going to do this for me."

The *Baronin* took a deep breath, and she seemed as though, from death, she was returning again to life, and her immobility left her.

"Lairlie," she cried, holding out her arms, "Lairlie, my son——" She rose from her chair and went towards him, and he put his arm across her shoulder.

"Lairlie, I owe you an apology," she went on; "I, your mother, am on my knees to you. Do not think that I cannot guess what this costs you, but, had you done otherwise, I should have carried out my pledge to you and to Lieutenant Gleeson." She leaned her head back and looked at him with a kind of glory of pride. "To-night you have given me back all my old love of you, and to-night I am happy. You are undertaking my trust for me, and you are risking more than I have risked."

Von Arthal kissed her hands but said nothing, and she turned to Kennedy again.

"You will go to Emmerich?" she asked.

"No, by some other way," he said, looking at the fire. "It is best, believe me, *Madame*, that you should know nothing of the details. It is sufficient, is it not, that I am to return?"

The *Baronin*, still holding Lairlie by the arm, came to where Kennedy stood, and placed her hand on his shoulder.

"It is so wonderful," she said; "one's dreams do come true sometimes, and *le Bon Dieu* is merciful."



Kennedy turned and smiled at her.

"I will try and believe that also," he said very quietly; "and now, *Madame*, if you will forgive me, may I leave you and sleep, for the journey will be long, and also—rather trying."

He kissed her hand and bowed to Von Arthal, who stood without speaking.

And then Kennedy went up the wide staircase to his own room, and faced the bitterest hours he had ever known in all the accumulated anguish of his time of captivity. The prison walls were closing round him again, the squalor, the dirt, the awful drab dreariness of life, and he must go back. Soon the house would be quiet, and, if he made an attempt to escape, no one would gainsay him; but this he could never do. Never before had he known all the wonderful, precious value of freedom, the little things that meant bodily comfort, the hope of return to Elodie. He had to go back to the barren garden where the starved plants were growing dry and dead under the passing of the days, and nothing but his own pledged word stood between him and his liberty, that and the figure of the *Baronin*, whom he had made so happy by telling a good lie really well. The remembrance of his own experiences haunted him, and he caught sight of the faces of fellow-prisoners, peering out into the endless vistas of days and nights.

He shivered a little, and sat down by the fire; there would be no sleep for him that night. He was bound for the renewed torture of the cold, drawn-out weeks and months, and his eyes filled with unutterable misery.

The room he sat in was full of beautiful furniture, and he was warm and comfortable there, but he saw and felt nothing of it all. His soul cried out for Elodie—Elodie—Elodie—and Elodie could not know how stricken he felt. He was going back to it, to the

grinding misery, the living hell, the awful solitary life, which was at the same time so crowded.

Kenny sat until the fire burned out into ashes, his face pale and unmoved, and his calm grew as he felt a sense of contempt for life.

"All thy waves have passed over my soul;" out of some corner of memory the words returned to him.

Life had robbed him of all he had, and still he knew that he must not break. To-morrow he must leave the *Schloss* with a gay smile and a gay word for every one, and he would let Von Arthal realize that he felt no rancour towards him merely because he fulfilled his duty. There is, after all, only one way in which any one may deal with invincible fate, and that is to bear it with a touch of pride—and, when it is possible, with a laugh.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

**I**N the morning Kennedy was provided by Johann with a suit of plain clothes, which the old valet said the *Herr* Von Arthal thought would be more comfortable for his journey. He breakfasted in his own room, and at about eleven o'clock they were to start. The *Baronin* wished to see him before he left, and she was to receive him in her own room.

"We shall be lonely once more," said Johann, as he bustled about the room, "but good times will return, and you with them. Once you have come here, *mein Herr*, you will remember your old friends again."

"I shall never forget," said Kennedy; "no, Johann, not even in a world like this, where memories are short."

"It is after the war that we shall all remember many things," said the old man. "See, *mein Herr*, I have made ready all that you will need."

Kennedy walked out of his room and was met by Herminie, who conducted him to *Madame*.

"She is happy," she said, "so happy, and never since the trouble began have she and Monsieur Lairlie been so close together. You have brought them *bonne fortune*, *Monsieur*, you who came here as an unexpected guest."

"I had a very unexpected welcome," he said, as gaily as he could, and then Herminie opened the door and ushered him into the *Baronin's* great room, where she was sitting by the window. Outside the world was covered with snow, and long blue shadows lay over its whiteness. The glitter and glare was strong,

and cast its reflection inwards, touching the face of the *Baronin* with fine, transparent shadows.

"*Mon garçon*," she said, laying her hand on his sleeve, "I am praying for you. You are facing dangers of which none of us know, but you will be brought safely through. There is very little which I can say to you now, except to give you my blessing. I believe that you are a man of the highest honour and the most sincere purpose, and I ask you, now that you are soon to be surrounded by all the happiness which awaits your return, to spare me an occasional memory. In happier days you may come back, and bring with you the girl whom you will marry."

Kennedy bent his head and said nothing. The irony of it, the cruelty of the jests that *le Bon Dieu* permitted Himself to make, was preoccupying his mind, and he could not altogether trust himself to speak.

"I shall think of your return," went on the *Baronin*, "for I have a fine imagination, and my thoughts will be with you. Your sister, of whom you have spoken so often, how glad she will be, and I have all the happiness of feeling that I have been of help, of use to you, and, through you, to those you love."

"I owe an endless debt of gratitude to you," said Kennedy; "one I shall not look to pay, nor do I want to."

"And to Lairlie," said the *Baronin*. "I sat until late last night talking to him. He admires you, *Monsieur*, and he said that he regarded you as a very noble and admirable soldier. He even told me," went on the *Baronin*, "that he felt war-sick and weary of it all. I have, in my dreams, promised myself that, on the advent of peace, you and he will be friends. It is only such hopes as these that make life bearable. You will fight again, and so will he, but, if you are both spared from this carnage, you can never meet except as friends. Is it not so?"

"I think it should be so." Kennedy stood up; he

felt that he must cut this interview short, it was tearing his heart, and he had still so much more ahead which he must bear.

"I would have given my life for your liberty," she said, with a magnificent gesture of simplicity. "I was prepared to do so."

"I knew that, believe me, I knew that," he said earnestly. After all, it was something to be able in return to give his own liberty for her brave life.

She rose, and put her hands on his shoulders, and, drawing down his face, she kissed his forehead.

"God watch over you," she said, and her fine eyes filled with tears, "in all your journey, and bring you safe to your own land. I shall never cease to pray for you, *mon fils*."

Kennedy looked round the room, and then back to the woman who stood so still, as he knelt with a sudden impulse, and pressed her hand to his mouth.

"When I heard you singing as I lay in the snow I thought you were my mother, and that you had come back to me," he said, his voice low and moved. "Now, whatever the future holds, *Madame*, you have given me an imperishable memory to hold by, if the lights grow dim."

He got up to his feet and they looked at each other in a long, silent regard, and then Kennedy turned away, closing the door very gently behind him.

When he reached the hall Von Arthal was waiting, and he explained to Kennedy that he was driving himself in his small car, as he had very little luggage and it was more convenient. They only just greeted one another, and then went out together, and Von Arthal looked up at the towers as he sat down in the driver's seat.

"My mother is at her window," he said, and Kenny turned and waved his hand as he smiled, and, after a few moments, they were racing along the cleared path cut through the snow.

The world was wonderfully fair, under a calm, blue sky, and the trees glittered with tiny crystals of frost. Never before had it all looked more desirable or more beautiful in the eyes of Kennedy Gleeson. The sensation was something like that of going out across a prison yard on a gay day to the indecent horror of a hangman's shed, and Kennedy sat with his head bent and made no effort to break the silence between him and Von Arthal.

He knew nothing of what Lairlie intended to do with him, but he thought that he would very likely run him down to Duisburg, and there put him in charge of a guard. The distance between Duisburg and Crefeld was not very great, and he might be in the cells by morning, doing his term of solitary confinement among the rats and the filth.

On either side of the road the wide, snow-covered country spread away grandly, the hard, dark outlines of the fir woods standing up bold against the sky, and, as the car swung along, Kennedy noticed that Von Arthal had taken the way by the seaward course of the Rhine, and not towards Duisburg. He did not think very much of it at the moment, but he wondered vaguely if he was to be brought to a point nearer than Duisburg or Orsoy.

Von Arthal drove with his eyes turned on the road, and his face was set and hard. He looked like a man who was carrying through a distasteful duty, and wanted to have it over. Owing to the snow, the roads were nearly empty of traffic, and the glaring whiteness was hardly scarred at all by the passing of heavy wheels. Once they passed a transport lorry in difficulties and drawn up by the roadside, and the small car which Lairlie drove bumped over the piled snow at the edge of the road, and, after that, he appeared to be anxious about the gears.

They came to the foot of a hill, and climbed it with difficulty on the low speed, and, at the top, there was

a flat, level sweep of land, leading on to the distant roofs of a town. The roads from various points met together and formed a cross-roads of five, and Kennedy remembered the old superstition which decreed that, at the meeting of five roads, fate sat waiting with a bag on her back. What she waited for he had never heard. Perhaps it was to gather up souls, or perhaps she had gifts to give; anyhow, the legend ran that, always at a five-roads cross, she was to be found.

Von Arthal stopped the car suddenly and spoke to Kennedy.

"Do you mind getting out, *Herr Leutnant*," he said, "and seeing whether she wants water? It's been a bit of a pull up this hill with the roads in bad condition."

Kennedy got out and unscrewed the brass knob on the top of the radiator. So far as he could tell everything was all right, and he said so, and turned to get back again. To his utter surprise Von Arthal released the brake and began to move forward, and, as he did so, he leaned over, pointing towards the town.

"I absolve you from your *parole*," he said, and he looked Kennedy full in the face. "You are about a mile out of Emmerich—or less. Good luck, Gleeson," and, before Kennedy could think of a word of thanks or gratitude, the car sped on, and he stood watching it disappear to a tiny dot, going swiftly away and away to the horizon.

He was a free man again, and he stood aware of nothing but the violent beating of his own heart.

As he walked down the road to Emmerich, he thought and thought of Von Arthal. The night before he had certainly intended to give him up, little as he liked it, but, after that, there had been the interview with the *Baronin* in the great *salon*. The power of his mother's influence, and the queer mixture in his own blood, combined with the comradeship of youth,

had conquered all else, and he had taken this way to give Kennedy his freedom. He was still thinking of it all as he walked into Emmerich and went through the clean, Dutch-looking streets to the *Rheinischer Hof*, a big hotel in the principal square, built in red stone, with white beams across the front and a wreath of golden laurels hung over the entrance.

Kennedy walked up the steps and asked for *Mijnheer* Van De Velde, whose carriage, he was told, was waiting in the stable-yard at the back, as the *Mijnheer* was preparing to start for home.

In a small room, crowded with heavy furniture, Kennedy met the Dutch lawyer, who greeted him with formal kindness. He was a tall man, with a long, narrow face, and grey eyes shaded by dim spectacles, and he spoke with a touch of rapture of the *Baronin*. For her sake he was prepared to do anything, and he had heard from her and contrived the difficult question of the passport. She had been such a beautiful girl, and he wished to talk of her, far more than of Kennedy, or his escape, in which he only took a secondary interest. He knew the *Baronin's* temperament so well, he said, and he felt that if he did not intervene and make the plans, she might jeopardize herself by some wild scheme, which would involve her own personal safety.

Kennedy grew conscious that he had become attached to the fringes of the lawyer's one romance, and that the *Baronin* had once again exercised her own magnetic powers.

He crossed the frontier at Zebenaar, and made a declaration that he was of Dutch nationality, on his way to Arnheim. The officials knew *Mijnheer* Van De Velde, and the whole process was a matter of form; and as he stood on Dutch territory he looked back towards the country where he had suffered so many things and had learnt so much.



At the last, the thought which came to him most strongly was the memory of George Palliser.

Kennedy and the lawyer, who were by now good friends, on the score of their mutual admiration, took the train to Arnheim, and there he remained one night.

Next day he was going to England, and once again all the world was his own. All the world and all his happiness were his, and the winds over the sea called to him, and the sound of the waves along the side of the ship sang delirious songs in his ears.

. . . . .

He crossed during the night, and in the morning he saw the line of cliffs against a pale green sky. He was back home once more; almost the same Kennedy Gleeson, with all his feelings charged with a sensation of life that was little short of divine. What matter if the roads were deep in slush, what matter if the wind was like a whip-lash, he was back in the world he knew and in a few hours he would see Elodie again!

## CHAPTER XXXVII

**W**HILE Kennedy was having breakfast at his Club, Elodie, who knew nothing of his arrival, and who had begun to mourn him as dead, was facing another day which had to be got through somehow, like all days that are shadowed by a deep, enduring sadness.

It was months since she had heard from Palliser, and since then no word of any kind had come through. She had received some of Kenny's belongings, and had cried over them until her eyes were worn and heavy, and then the time had come when Hil and Larry had returned to London, and Hilda had come back to the flat.

Larry was in hospital for an operation, and after that he was a discharged man, free to return to Adrigole.

Hil said that they were both very happy. Until the possession you most value has been all but taken from you, you do not know how much it means to you, and she and Larry had learnt that knowledge to the full.

They spoke of Kennedy as of some one who is dead, and only Elodie refused to give up hope. She would not leave London and join them at Adrigole when they went away, and she continued to work, though her old life had dwindled down and she was a very shadowy Elodie, with large, wistful eyes.

Teddy was married, and Lady Gertrude had retired to a small house in the country. She was enraged against her son, and had published her own feelings so freely, that Edith, who always enjoying taking the bull by the horns, refused to see or speak to her mother-in-

law, and the break in the family was unlikely to be bridged over. Teddy was happy, and Edith had been right when she said that he only required managing. Elodie saw them often, and it was Edith who encouraged her and gave her the support of a strong faith.

"He will come back," she said over and over again. "Things like that don't happen, Elodie. Don't believe the others. I am sure that Kennedy is alive, and even if we hear nothing until the war is over, he will be one of the men who has battled through."

Every known way of getting news of prisoners had been tried in vain, and still the silence held, until one day Elodie received a letter which came to her through Holland, saying that she must remember that there was "hope somewhere." The letter was unsigned, and she lived on it for weeks, until the first glory of encouragement waned again.

The morning was cold and wet, and a heavy drizzle washed the streets. London looked tired and shabby, and she watched the people who walked with their umbrellas tilted against the rain. Soon she must go out and join them, but she hated the thought of it all. If Kennedy were really dead she could not know less of what he was doing.

She turned to the fire and crouched down close to the blaze, and Julia, who was carrying out her morning's skirmish with the flat, came in and looked at her.

"My God, it's not going out you are into that weather?" she asked. "Not a step will you stir this day, for you have the noise of a cold in your voice."

Julia was another faithful believer in the return of Kennedy, and she rent and tore any one who doubted it.

"Sure, there's times," she went on, "when I gets like that myself; but you must have courage, Miss Elodie."

"Oh, Julia, Julia," Elodie said suddenly, "I'm so wretched. I don't know how one is to go on."

Julia came and put her arms round Elodie's shoulders.

"Is it go on? Why, like Paddy Macasay's dog, who, when the one leg was put out of action, crossed the world on what was left to him." She raised her head, for there was a ring at the door. "Now, whoever you are," she said, apostrophizing the invisible caller, "you'll wait. Ringing and ringing they do be, early and late. Let them have patience."

"I wish I was like Paddy Macasay's dog," said Elodie with a smile, "only my bad leg is very bad to-day, Julia. Don't you ever have a bad leg yourself?"

Julia laughed.

"It wouldn't mend it for me if I bawled like an ass in a churchyard," she remarked, and the bell rang again—a long persistent ring that spoke of great impatience. "If I don't get rid of that one, he'll have the wires broke," remarked Julia; "but I'll eat the face of him for his sauce. Ringing like a Lord Mayor, and he, probably, nothing but the groceries. I'll learn him manners," and she went off with the eagerness of one who is well able to express herself.

Elodie dropped down to the fire again and shivered, and then the whole air seemed full of cries. Julia was screaming and praying and giving vent to a kind of pandemonium of noise, and, above it all, the sound of the words "Master Kennedy, Master Kennedy," rang like a bugle-call. Elodie sprang to her feet and stood staring at the door, and before she could advance a step, Kennedy came in and folded her into his arms, crushing her to him in the wild, glorious moment of meeting.

He was back with her; he was alive; he was well.

"Kenny, Kenny," she said again and again, and she could not stand away to look at him, but she could

feel his thick hair with her hands and the strong, hard touch of his face against hers.

He brought her to the sofa, and sat looking at her, for he did not seem able to speak. How could any one say all the things that live in their hearts at such a moment?

"Kenny Kenny," Elodie said again—— And, after all, what else is there to say?

It was spring in Ireland, and the sunlight laughed along the wide stretches of the Blackwater below Adrigole. The red ploughlands were shot with the pale emerald of the young corn, and leaves were stirring in the branches, forecasting the coming green over the woods and the little copses. The cawing of rooks was making its pleasant noise in the air, and the world was renewing its life. Earth was full of the mystery of the season, and the mountains were coloured by blue lakes of fleeting shadows. The whole world was gay, with its graciousness and peace, and Kennedy had brought Elodie back to Castle Glenfield for his first leave back from France since they had been married.

There were great celebrations everywhere, and Uncle Richard Joicey and Frank and Etta Northcote had resumed their conversation exactly where they had left off before the war. Uncle Richard was the guest of Kenny and Elodie, and Frank and Etta stayed at Adrigole with Larry and Hilda. The lady of the lamp watched everything with the same inward concentration, and Kennedy and his wife decided that the lamp must be mended at last.

Hilda and Larry were giving a dinner-party to the family, and there was to have been a small dance, only that Lady Killiney died suddenly and the county went into mourning. For Larry and Hil the war was ended and they had saved the main things from the wreckage, and had lived to see Kennedy and Elodie happy

also. Larry was able to ride, and he was to take up the Mastership of the hounds again the following winter; and as he rode along through the spring lanes he looked forward, and wondered in his heart.

How much had been crowded into a little bit of life, and how much one had left behind in France. The memories were clear and they could not be forgotten; somehow, other things had shrunk, and nothing seemed quite as important as it all had been. But the people at home had not changed, they would never change, just as he knew that never again would he be the same Larry Grove who had once lived for the doings of a day. His face was sad, in repose, and he looked down the road before him, every bit of it so well known. He had done his best in France, not in any distinguished way, possibly, but he had learnt to know himself over there. How far off the tumult seemed to him now, and he missed it—he missed it horribly. He and Hil were hoping for a little son, and if the boy came, it would do a lot for them both, because it was no longer sufficient just to be happy together. One wants more than that. A son to bring up, not in the idle, wasteful old way, but to teach him to know that his life was in itself a heritage from the men who had died to protect their country, and who had given themselves in the war for the sake of children unborn and for the safety of the next generation.

Larry did not deal very much in theories, but this point was plain to him. His son should understand what he himself had only learnt on the battlefields of France. As he rode up towards Castle Glenfield, he met Kennedy coming in from the woods, and he hailed him with a shout.

“By Gad, it’s queer to be all together again,” he said, and he got down from his horse and limped along beside Gleeson.

“Yes,” said Kennedy, “going away was strange, but I think coming back is quite as big a thing. You

and I, old boy, and Hil and Elodie—we've a lot to be thankful for."

"I am thankful," said Larry slowly; "only I can't get over it, somehow. It takes getting over."

Kennedy put his hand on his brother-in-law's arm.

"One leaves bits behind—war brings one close to people. It's worth it, Larry."

They neither of them spoke again, and they walked into the house, where Elodie ran into the hall to greet them.

"Mr. Watts is in the drawing-room," she said with a laugh; "he is talking to Uncle Richard, Ken. Do go in."

Kennedy kissed her, and looked at her proudly, and then he walked into the drawing-room.

"I have always felt that Dublin is not quite the environment for a cosmopolitan like myself," Uncle Richard Joicey was remarking in his thin, educated voice. "I don't know if you agree with me, Mr. Watts?"

Mr. Watts sprang to his feet and greeted Kennedy with outstretched hands.

"Delighted to see you, Major Gleeson," he said; "delighted. So you are back from the war. You didn't hear of the war we have been having here in Castle Glenfield? Oh, I assure you that all the fighting isn't done in France. Even *now* the Braydons will not come to my church, and they actually *hire* a carriage to go to Kilvanner. It costs them something, after the Government commandeered their carriage horses. But you'd hardly believe it, would you? Oh, my, my!"

For there are still some places where it is always yesterday.

THE END









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